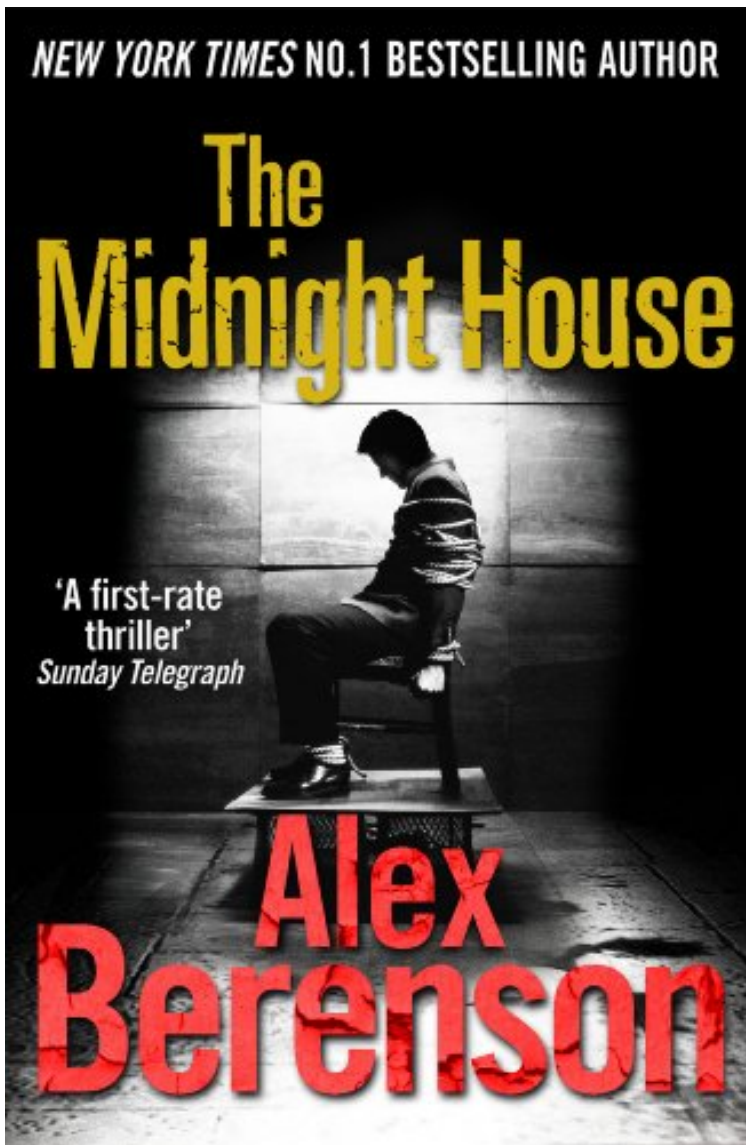


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# The Midnight House



*Par Alex Berenson*

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWhen members of a secret American interrogation squad that was running a black site in Poland in 2007 and 2008 and had since been disbanded are murdered, John Wells is asked to investigate. But his enquiries lead him to discover that while the squad came up with some very valuable intel, its tactics were questionable at best...Extrait... I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow, to the land of deepest night.Job 10:2122Praise forTHE MIDNIGHT HOUSEIn Berensons skillful hands, moral dilemmas and rousing action produce a novel very much worth reading.The Dallas Morning NewsBerenson tells a fast-paced and riveting tale that ranges from derring-do in Pakistan and Cairo, to plodding gumshoe detection in L.A. and New Orleans, to assassination in San Francisco, and to bureaucratic trench warfare in

Washington, D.C. His characters are either deftly sketched or fully realized. His writing is succinct, with dashes of cynical humor. But the books linchpin is decisions made by the U.S. after 9/11 decisions that seem to be sparking a flurry of outstanding espionage novels, with Berensons work in the forefront. Booklist Ingeniously plotted and fast-paced... The story features emotionally affecting and high-action scenes in vividly portrayed settings; memorable characters contribute to the readers comprehension of how the CIAs overseas rendition program may have been of enormous benefit to national security but also grossly immoral and personally destructive to its participants, terror suspects and interrogators alike.

Verdict: Arguably Berensons best thriller yet, this outstanding novel stands on the top rung of commercial spy fiction. Library Journal A superbly crafted spy thriller that doubles as a gripping mystery; the reader has no idea who the killer is until Wells figures it out. Kirkus sJohn Wells is back, lean and just mean enough...

Berenson, who has covered the Iraq war for the New York Times, does a fine job with the books globe-trotting settings and satisfyingly twisted plot. Wells is a refreshing thriller hero, sort of the antiJack Bauer. Although The Midnight House has its share of cinematic firefights and fisticuffs, we more often see Wells pursuing the real work of spycraft: learning a culture well enough to blend in (whether in Pakistan or Langley), listening to people closely enough to see whats going on behind their words, practicing patience. St. Petersburg Times THE SILENT MAN The Silent Man succeeds in seizing the [readers] attention from the start and never letting go. The New York Times John Wells saves the world for the third time in as many books, but we wouldnt have it any other way... Keeps the reader caring and guessing until the end. Booklist A remarkable novel of espionage based on real-world threats and a chillingly plausible scenario. The Calgary Sun Its an exciting story and a timely one... Superior entertainment. The Washington Post Well-plotted and thoughtful... Fast and furious when it needs to be, this is a welcome addition to an excellent series. Publishers Weekly A swift and gripping read reminiscent of David Stones thrillers. Library Journal Action-packed, thrilling. Kirkus sTHE GHOST WAR The authenticity Berenson brings to his ripped-from-the-headlines stories makes them seem as vividly real and scary as nonfiction or the nightly news. Booklist Heart-pumping adventure. USA Today Mesmerizing... an extraordinary achievement. The (Raleigh, NC) News Observer An engaging story that will have readers captivated... A fast-paced story of international intrigue and espionage... Wells is a fine character who will likely propel Berensons thrillers to success for some time to come. Chicago Sun-Times A very sophisticated vision... Geopolitically savvy. The New York Times A novel that offers a thrill a page and delivers a terrific story. The (Toronto) Globe and Mail Terrific and relentless suspense and action. Kirkus sTHE FAITHFUL SPY WINNER OF THE EDGAR AWARD A well-crafted page-turner that addresses the most important issue of our time. It will keep you reading well into the night. Vince Flynn One of the best espionage books of all time. William Stevenson, author of A Man Called Intrepid An intriguing thriller studded with alarming possibilities. New York Daily News The best spy thriller in a long, long while. The Kansas City Star Berenson offers a very American story a sort of terrorist High Noon... Exciting. The New York Times A hold-your-breath thriller... a grabber. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Mounting suspense, a believable scenario, and a final twist add up to a compelling tale of frightening possibilities. Publishers Weekly A well-informed, often chilling look at how al-Qaeda might launch a major new attack in the United States. The Washington Post THE BERKLEY PUBLISHING GROUP Published by the Penguin Group Penguin Group (USA) Inc. 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario M4P 2Y3, Canada (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.) Penguin Books Ltd., 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England Penguin Group Ireland, 25 St. Stephens Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd.) Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty. Ltd.) Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi 110 017, India Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd.) Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty.) Ltd., 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa Penguin Books Ltd., Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the authors imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental. The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content. THE MIDNIGHT HOUSE A Jove Book / published by arrangement with the author PRINTING HISTORY G. P. Putnam's Sons hardcover edition / February 2010 Jove premium edition / February 2011 Copyright 2010 by Alex Berenson. Excerpt from The Secret Soldier copyright by Alex Berenson. The Edgar name is a registered

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ISBN: 978-1-101-18526-1 JOVE Jove Books are published by The Berkley Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014. JOVE is a registered trademark of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. The J design is a trademark of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS PROLOGUE ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN. JUNE 2008 To the worst place in the world. The worst place in the world. George Fezcko and Dwayne Maggs raised their glasses and drank. The going-away party was over. One by one, the ops had said their good-byes and disappeared. Only Fezcko and Maggs were left. Fezcko, the guest of honor, leaving Pakistan after four years as deputy chief of station. And Maggs, his best friend at the agency. The clock on the wall said 1:30, and theyd been drinking since dinner, but Fezcko felt solid. Maggs had gotten hold of a half-dozen Omaha steaks and two racks of ribs. The meat had soaked up most of the scotch in Fezckos belly. Though not all. Fezcko put his head against the cool wood of the conference table and hummed tunelessly: We few, we ragged few, we motley crew... He trailed off. He couldnt remember the rest of the song, or even if there was a rest of the song. Mtley Cre, Maggs said. Dirty deeds, done dirt cheap. Thats AC/DC. Marine recon, too. Why does it always go back to the marines? By now everyone in this country knows youre a jarhead. All one hundred fifty million. Fezcko tapped Maggs on the forehead. Tattoo it right there. The few, the proud, the stupid. You wish you coulda been a marine, Maggs said. Berkeley boy. You wouldnt have made it through the first week of basic. Eaten up and spat out. Maggs was the stations director of security. He was short and wide and strong, arms as big as an average mans legs. Fezcko had thinning curly hair and wild black eyes. In college hed played bass for a band that had almost broken out. They shouldnt have gotten along. But they did. A marine? I wish I coulda been Tom Brady. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Land of the free, home of the suicide bomber. Bet you miss it already, Maggs said. Whats not to miss? The earthquakes. The weather. The fifteen pounds I put on cause its too hot to run outside. Fezcko poked at the belly hed gained. Cant blame Paki for that. That gym in the basement is pretty good. As youd know if you ever visited. I like to run outside. How about the women? Those beautiful Paki women. Fezcko sipped his scotch. Black-and-blue with the ugly stick, he said. I never should have let Marci divorce me. Maybe if our security officers didnt lock us in the embassy all the time, maybe then wed find out what those burqas are hiding. Cant even go down the block to the Marriott for a going-away party. Its a Marriott, for Gods sake. Indeed, because of the risk of terrorist attacks, the agency barred employees in Pakistan from gathering at hotels and restaurants. Maggs had refused to make an exception, even tonight. Dont mind getting you killed, but theres got to be a reason, Maggs said. You know better than me, they aim for that Marriott once a month. I know who youre gonna miss. The army and the ISI the Inter-Services Intelligence agency, the Pakistani secret police. Between them the two services more or less ran Pakistan. The army and the ISI. The ISI and the army. Ill tell you something about the ISI and the army. Yeah. Give me the speech. With feeling. Like I havent heard it a hundred times before. The Egyptians, the Saudis, when they lie to you, they do it with a smile. Pour you tea, tell a story that takes an hour, and when theyre done youre about ready to fall for whatever theyre spinning. These guys, they just yell, like if I give you this nonsense at high volume it wont sound so ridiculous. They arent all bad, maybe, but most of em... Remember when they won that cricket match and almost burned down Karachi? Fezcko looked into his glass. You really think Pakis the worst place in the world? Somalias bad. Worse than this? Hotter. And blacker. You think you can say that just cause youre black? Insult your African cousins? Maggs smirked. I can say it because Im a marine. Lets drink to Somalia, then, Fezcko said. The even-worse worst place in the world. Somalia. See you there. Three years. Itll be like that movie with the French chick I always knew you were gay, George Fezcko struggled for the memory lurking in his alcohol-fogged brain. Ethan Hawke. Julie Something Gayer by the second. Before Sunrise, Fezcko said triumphantly... AND THEN HIS PAGER buzzed. He pulled it off his waist, squinted at it. The scotch had blurred his eyes, and he didnt recognize the numbers. Then he did. 36963. Code for call me now from Nawiz Khan, a division chief for the ISI. Fezcko slid the pager across the table to Maggs. Nawiz? Maggs said. Wants to wish you good-bye. Fezcko didnt trust

the ISI, but he did trust Khan, since a blown raid in Peshawar two years back. He and Khan had had to shoot their way out of an apartment. Khan took a round in the left thigh that night. He still favored the leg. Fezcko stood, feeling the steak and the ribs twist in his gut, and headed down the hall, shielding his eyes from the fluorescent lights. He touched his thumb to the fingerprint reader beside the door of his office. Inside, he sat down heavily on the edge of his desk and called Khan. Who answered after a single ring. Fezcko, Khan said, somehow making the name sound glamorous. The years he'd spent at university in London had given him a soft English accent. Nawiz? May I speak freely? You asking if this line is secure? Yeah, its secure. Also if you are as drunk as you sound. Fezcko laughed. Not quite. Though its been a long night. It has been a long night for me as well, George. But I have something you will want to see. Something or someone? Both. Big? If youre asking me, am I in line for your fifty million dollar the CIAs reward for the capture of Osama bin Laden the answer is no. But, my friend, I wouldnt have called at this hour if this wasnt worth your while. You may want to let your CT team know as well. CT was agency lingo for the practice known publicly as extraordinary rendition. The letters stood for collection and transfer, snatching suspected terrorists from their home countries and holding them in American custody. My CT team, Fezcko said. Thats me and Maggs. As you know. My men will make the arrest, then. And I will give them to you as a going-away present. Them? What are you doing to me, Nawiz? The question you should be asking me is what am I doing for you. We gonna need a G-five for this? A Gulfstream V jet, capable of carrying a dozen passengers halfway around the world without refueling, and thus the preferred method of transport for renditions. I think so. These men, its best if they leave Pakistan. Man. You couldnt have given me a little notice? I need an hour, make some calls. And drink some coffee. That, too. One hour. No more. One hour. . . BUT NINETY MINUTES PASSED before Fezcko and Maggs rolled out the side gate of the embassy in a black Nissan sedan. The car looked stock, but its windows were bullet-resistant and its doors were reinforced with steel plates. It wasnt as sturdy as the armored Suburbans that the ambassador and the chief of station preferred, but it would stop an AK round and it didnt attract attention. In the passenger seat, Fezcko tried to rest, while his bodyguard, an ex-Ranger with the unlikely name of Leslie, drove. Maggs was in the back, playing a driving game on his iPod, his preferred method of relaxation before a mission. He seemed to have sobered up immediately. Fezcko wished he could say the same. Even after three cups of coffee, he was hardly in peak form. Before he left, he had gotten a definite maybe for a rendition from Josh Orton, the assistant chief for the Near East Section. Im going to need more details, Orton had said, from his desk seven thousand miles away at Langley. You think? Dont get pissy with me, George. You know the rules. Since 2006, the agency had become much more reluctant to authorize renditions, although they still took place. The Nissan swung out of the Diplomatic Enclave, the high-security zone in eastern Islamabad that was home to the American embassy and other foreign missions. The night air was surprisingly cool for June. A breeze fluttered through the trees along Constitution Avenue. After Pakistan gained independence in 1947, its military leaders decided to create a new capital city that would be easier to control than Karachi, the original capital. The result was Islamabad, a million-person city that Pakistanis called Isloo. With its boulevards, parks, and office towers, Isloo wasnt a bad place to live, at least compared to the rest of Pakistan. The city reminded Fezcko of Charlotte, his hometown though Charlotte didnt have a mosque that could hold three hundred thousand worshippers. The Nissan turned southwest on Nazimuddin Road, leaving the Diplomatic Enclave behind. Rather than giving names to the neighborhoods, Islamabads planners had divided the city into zones identified by numbers and letters. Sixty years later, the system had stuck. Fezcko and Maggs were headed for the I-10 zone, a lightly built area on the southwestern edge of the city. Fezckos phone trilled. Are you standing me up? Nawiz, please. Were on the way. Fezcko hung up, wondering at the urgency. Khan wasnt a nervous guy. Ten minutes later, the Nissan pulled up outside an unfinished concrete building. A rusting white sign identified the shell as the Future Center of the All-Pakistan Medical Commons. As Fezcko stepped out of the Nissan, the buildings steel front door creaked open. A trim middle-aged man limped out toward him. Salaam alekeim, Nawiz. Alekeim salaam. They hugged, clapping each other tightly on the back. If I didnt know better, Id think you were friends, Maggs said. Come, Nawiz said. Ill show you your going-away present. . . INSIDE, A BIG OPEN room with a floor of hard-packed dirt. The air thick with dust and the stink of diesel smoke. A noisy generator powered strings of Christmas tree-sized white bulbs tacked to the walls, giving the place a strangely festive feel. In the corner opposite the generator, two men played checkers on a cheap folding table. Three more napped at their feet. Your crack team, Fezcko said. Merely conserving their energy. Khan handed Fezcko a long-lens photograph of a truck, a Mitsubishi ten-wheeler, the cab metallic blue with a spiffy beige stripe painted horizontally beneath the windshield. Abu Zaineb Textile Manufacture (PVT) Ltd was

stenciled in black on the cargo compartment. Nice truck, Fezcko said. Such insight. I see why you've been promoted. Is Abu Zaineb Textile real? We can't find the name. Though that's not dispositive, you understand. Dispositive, Maggs said. Mighty big word for a Paki. Khan waved off Maggs and handed Fezcko another photo, this one centered on a pair of men standing beside the truck. One wore a white salwar kameez, the long tunic and pants favored by many Pakistani men. The other was younger and dressed Western-style, in jeans and a red T-shirt that, strangely, had a Batman logo stamped on its front. You know them? Fezcko shook his head. This one. Khan pointed to the man in the salwar kameez. His name is Asif Ali. He is a cousin of Jawaruddin. Jawaruddin was Jawaruddin bin Zari, a thirty-four-year-old from Peshawar who was wanted for numerous terrorist attacks, including four bombings in Peshawar and the killing of two American aid workers in Karachi. He was a member of a terrorist group called Ansar Muhammad that had first turned up in 2006. In Arabic, ansar literally meant patrons, or supporters, but the word was usually translated as warriors in this case, the warriors of Muhammad. The CIA didn't know much about Ansar Muhammad, though the agency had picked up hints of connections between the group and the ISI. Some analysts at Langley believed the ISI was using the group to carry out anti-American attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In any case, bin Zari was a high-value target. Capturing him would be a coup for the agency, at least until his successor popped up. Asif's an actual cousin? Or more like a good friend? You've reached the limits of my knowledge, George. He was introduced to my men as a cousin. We didn't perform a DNA test. And he's part of Ansar Muhammad? Based on what I'm about to show you, it seems likely. What about the other guy? Batman? We don't know. Probably a driver. Khan handed across a third photo, this one focused on the Mitsubishi's cargo compartment, which was filled with oil drums and plastic sacks. A fourth photo focused on the sacks, which were stamped Highest-Quality Nitrogen Fertilizer. Khan didn't have to explain further. Ammonium nitrate and fuel oil were the basic ingredients for truck bombs. These were taken where? Peshawar. Khan lifted his eyebrows, as if to say Where else? Two days ago. My men learned that Asif Ali would be at a restaurant. They followed him, took these photos. Dumb luck. Your men learned how? The usual way. A friend of a friend of an enemy. That like a cousin? This from Maggs. I'd like some details on the sourcing, Fezcko said. Khan lifted his shoulders a fraction of an inch: Too bad. Where's the truck now? Approximately fifteen hundred meters about a mile from here. It arrived yesterday. I had hoped that bin Zari or someone at his level might visit the operation in person. But I think now that moment has passed. And I think we ought to move quickly. Fezcko understood. The ISI was so riddled with Qaeda sympathizers that it was only a matter of time before the terrorists learned that Khan and his men were tracking them. Most likely very little time. Heck of a nice truck. Shame to blow it up. You know the target? Were all targets, George. Terrorism hurts us all. Khan moved his lips, pretending to smile. Roderick White arrives tomorrow for meetings with our president. He seems a likely candidate. Fezcko rubbed his forehead, wishing his going-away party had been some other night. How had he forgotten that Sir Roderick White, the British foreign minister, was coming to Islamabad? That sounds ambitious. You know our friends are optimists. And even if they don't reach him, they know that whatever they do will get extra attention tomorrow. Maybe they'll have help to get through a checkpoint or two. Fezcko didn't have to specify that the help would be coming from inside the ISI. Who else knows about this, Nawiz? Omar is the only one I've told. Omar Gul, an assistant director in the ISI's Counter-Terror Division. Sometimes known at Langley as the Counting on Terror Division. The CIA viewed Gul as the only reliable officer in the top ranks of the ISI, not least because he'd survived three assassination attempts in four years, the last of which had cost him his right eye. Fezcko saw why Khan was so anxious to move. You want to do this now. Get them out before the sun comes up. You and Omar are the only ones who know. Tomorrow, the next day, you come back on that truck, a big show. It's empty, and you tell your buddies that the bad guys disappeared. Khan nodded. Then whatever we get from them, maybe even some names inside your shop, nobody knows but you. Another nod. The plan was at least one step past risky. Maybe all the way to stupid. Renditions usually required approval from senior-level officials on both sides. Now Khan wanted to grab two men on the fly. They weren't in some village on the North-West Frontier, either. They were five miles from the Pakistani parliament. If something went wrong, if they got caught tonight, the Pakistani government wouldn't be able to ignore what had happened. Khan would go to jail. There would be anti-American riots. If anyone but Khan had made the offer, Fezcko would have rejected it outright for fear of a trap. But he trusted Khan. And the deal was tempting. Anything they could do to clean up the ISI would be valuable. We don't have a plane in country, Fezcko said, trying to buy time. Where will we keep them? Here. No problem getting them out? Not if you get a jet in today to Faisalabad. A city about 150 miles south of Islamabad. Fezcko nodded at Maggs.

They stepped to the other side of the room. Thoughts? Fezcko murmured. Nothing you dont know. Too good to be true? Setup? Not from him. You know my rule. Maggs rule was that you couldnt trust anyone in the ISI until hed taken a bullet next to you. It was a good rule. And just like that, Fezcko decided. All right, he yelled over the generator to Khan. Were in. Let me see about that G-five. And some authorization, he didnt add. For this operation, winks and nods wouldnt do. He wanted explicit approval, in writing. Behind the building, he called Orton on his sat phone. I was hoping it wouldnt be you, Orton said. Am I interrupting you, Josh? Gotta pick up the kids from soccer practice? Maybe a manicure? Just tell me. Fezcko did. Tricky, Orton said. If the ISI isnt going to know about it, were going to have to keep this one quiet. Theres only one place for them to go. And that takes special authorization. Have to call the Pentagon. No excuses, Fezcko said. Yes or no. He hung up. . . WHILE THEY WAITED, THEY grabbed body armor and M-4s from the Nissan and suited up. Khan and his men did the same, though their own gear was less fancy, vests and AK-47s. When they were done, Khans squad packed into a windowless white van tucked behind the building and rolled off. Fezcko and Maggs and Leslie followed in the Nissan. The Mitsubishi truck was easy to find, parked beside a Toyota 4Runner in front of a two-story concrete house in a district that mixed residential and light manufacturing. The house had a strangely Art Deco look, lime-green with a white roof. It belonged in Miami, not Islamabad, though Fezcko had seen similar color schemes in Pakistan before. Splashy paint jobs grabbed attention from cracked ceilings and leaky pipes. The house seemed deserted, no lights or movement inside. There were walls along the property lot but none in front. They rolled by without slowing. To the west, the city petered out. A mile down, Khans van parked behind a tall brick warehouse. Khan stepped out, tapped a cigarette out of the flat silver case he carried. He lit up, dragged deeply, exhaled twin jets of smoke from his nostrils. You blow any harder youll have liftoff, Maggs said. Let me guess, Khan said. Marines smoke three cigarettes at once. Because one at a time wouldnt be manly enough. Fezcko laughed. Now youre getting it, Nawiz. So thats the place, Maggs said. Khan nodded. Anybody watching it? My men installed a PTDA presence tracking device, also known as a bug on the truck in Peshawar. Two of my men are monitoring it. Khan tilted his head toward the second floor of the warehouse, where a cigarette glowed behind a window. The truck hasnt moved since they arrived yesterday. Who owns the house? Fezcko said. Property records show it belongs to a family that lives in Karachi. We dont know if theyre connected or if they even know its being used. Khan unrolled an oversized map, a street-by-street grid of the district. The maps corners rolled up, and Khans men grabbed bricks to weigh it down. High-tech, Fezcko said. My Predators are in the shop. Khan circled the target house in red Magic Marker, and for fifteen minutes he walked his squad and Fezcko through the raid. The plan was simple, based on simple assumptions: that the doors of the house wouldnt be reinforced or booby-trapped, and that they would be facing at most four men inside. Khans squad would handle the main assault, breaking through the front door and firing gas grenades to flush out the men. Fezckos team would circle the house, wait for the jihadis to escape through the back door. If they didnt come out in sixty seconds, Fezcko and Maggs would go in the back. When Khan was done, Fezcko pulled him aside. Too many guesses, Nawiz. If this gets ugly, were underpowered. No radios. Layouts a mystery. This is how you get hurt. Khan wrapped an arm around Fezckos shoulders, put his face to the Americans ear as if he planned to whisper a declaration of love eternal. Are you walking, George? Taking your ball and going home? Tell me now so I dont waste more time. We have to do this before the sun comes up. Go on back to Langley. Another American hero. In the cool night air, Fezcko felt himself flush. A cheap shot, sure, but there was truth behind it. His tour here was done. Khans would never be over. He pushed Khan off, less than a shove but more than a friendly tap, and walked away. The soft, brown mud of the parking lot sucked at his boots, and he tried not to wonder whether the soil was a metaphor for the quagmire of the endless war on terror. He stood behind a corner of the warehouse and called Langley. Anything yet? The good news is the planes in the air, Orton said. The bad news is that the DDOs not happy. But I have a conditional okay. Conditional on what? On your certifying that theres imminent risk of attack. The message from Langley was clear: Right back atcha. You want to play cowboy, go ahead, but dont expect us to cover your ass from eleven time zones away on an hours notice. Can you say career ender? Fezcko mumbled into the night. What? Orton said. I said put it in writing. My name. George. Whatever you have to do. Do it. Fezcko hung up, barely resisting the urge to smash the Iridium handset into the mud. . . THE RAID WENT BAD before they even reached the house. When Fezcko nodded to Khan, they pulled on their gas masks and grabbed their gear and rolled out east over the rough asphalt at eighty miles an hour. The house waited for them, still and silent. Then the lights inside flickered on. Fezcko felt as if hed been punched. He wondered if they should abort, but it wasnt his call. Anyway, letting the guys in the house get to the truck

would be a very bad idea. Khans van swung off the road and stopped a few yards from the front door. The van doors opened, and Khans squad jumped out. The two biggest men carried a knocker, a thick steel pipe with handles attached. Khans men sprinted for the house, Khan hobbling behind on his bad leg. Then the stuttering recoil of an automatic rifle sounded from the roof and the officer in front of Khan stumbled down. So much for surprising them, Fezcko murmured inside his mask. Adrenaline had burned through the last of the scotch in his blood. He felt alert and ready. Alive. Hed have a story for the grandkids at least. I ever tell you about my last night in Pakistan? Assuming he survived, of course. He slipped out of the Nissan, knelt behind the door. Rounds smashed into the window, and Fezcko was glad for the cars armor. Wheres the shooter? Find the shooter. Based on the angle, the guy was on the right side of the roof, close to the corner. Fezcko leaned around the door, raised his M-4, fired a four-shot burst at the front corner of the roof, trying to push the guy back. In the brief calm that followed, the wounded ISI agent pushed himself up and hopped toward the safety of the van. Khans men smashed the knocker into the front door. It shook but held. Fezcko wondered if it was reinforced. Now the men inside the house were firing jihadi specials, long bursts on full automatic that tore through the night and shattered the front windows. The racket sounded impressive, but the shots were basically unaimed, and Khans men stayed cool. Again they rammed the knocker into the door. This time it gave a couple of inches. Now they had a rhythm going, bang, bang, bang, a horizontal drumming. The door twisted sideways and gave. Fezcko caught a brief glimpse of a green-painted room inside before the lights went out. Khan and his men huddled around the front door. Fezcko lifted his mask. Stay here, he yelled to Leslie. Watch the front door, make sure nobody gets out this way. Take out the shooter on the roof if you can. But Stay. Thats an order. He looked at Maggs. Back door! he yelled. He lowered his mask and sprinted along the side of the house, keeping his head down. A window exploded over his head. He half dove, half fell, grunting as he banged an elbow against the side of the house. Clods of dirt covered the plastic face shield of his mask. Rounds thudded into the wall above him and shards of concrete cascaded down. How many guys were in there, anyway? Did they have grenades? Fezcko grabbed for the CS grenade on his belt, pulled the pin. He lifted the handle and tossed it through the steel bars of the blown-out window above his head. If things got worse, they would have to forget taking anyone alive and just smoke the place. Maggs ran by, doubled over but somehow staying on his feet. Fezcko wiped off his face shield and scuttled after him. Inside the house, men shouted at one another in Pashto. A man yelled Allahu akbar! Allahu akbar! and a long burst from an AK ripped through the night. The left-rear corner of the house had a square notch cut into it, offering cover from the side and back walls. Fezcko hid in the notch and peeked around the corner. The rear of the house was unpainted and unfinished. The property sloped down from front to back, so the back door was a couple feet off the ground. There were no stairs. Anyone inside would have to jump out. But for now, the back door was closed. Beside the door, thick plastic sheeting covered a window frame. As Fezcko watched, rifle fire tore apart the plastic, and a trail of CS gas leaked out. Someone coughed viciously, stopped, and then coughed again steadily. Then the back door swung open. A man peeked out. Not one of Khans squad. A jihadi. He leaned forward, craned his head left and right, but Fezcko and Maggs were hidden in the notch and he didnt see them. He jumped out, stumbled, righted himself, and began to run across the back lot. He was barefoot and wore a jean jacket and sweatpants. No gun, as far as Fezcko could tell. Maggs stepped out and raised his rifle. Fezcko pushed it aside. Alive. They sprinted after him. The jihadi ran for a gate at the back-left corner of the wall. He tugged it frantically as Maggs and Fezcko closed on him. Locked. He tried to climb over, but he was big and slow. Maggs jumped up, tugged him down, threw him onto his stomach. Fezcko put a knee on his shoulders and pushed his head down into the dirt. Maggs pulled his arms behind his back and cuffed them. Then Maggs straddled his legs and cuffed his ankles together. Hog-tie? Maggs said. Do it. Maggs pulled off his belt, thick black leather, and ran it between the two sets of cuffs and tied it so the prisoner was on his belly with his legs and arms leashed together. Fezcko gave the guy a quick dose of CS in the eyes. He howled at them in Arabic and blinked furiously. Tears streamed down his cheeks. Given enough time, he might figure out a way to slip off the belt. But even then hed have his arms and legs cuffed. And with his eyes on fire, hed have a tough time going anywhere. . . . SO THEY LEFT HIM in the corner, yelling, and ran to the house and took up positions by the back door. The door was swinging free. Fezcko grabbed it and pinned it against the outside wall and peeked inside. He couldnt see anyone, just construction materials, wood and bricks and cartons of tiles. Then the quiet scraping of a man trying not to cough. He seemed to be on the left side, hidden behind a half-finished wall. Maggs sent a CS grenade skittering into the room like a duckpin bowling ball. White smoke filled the room like dry ice rolling onto the dance floor at a sweet sixteen, and the

coughing started again, harder this time. Maggs pointed into the room and then at himself: Im going in. Cover me. Fezcko held up three fingers, two, one. He swung his rifle into the doorway and fired three shots into the darkness. Maggs levered himself up, jumped inside, ran for the coughing man. As he did, four shots, small-caliber, echoed inside the room. Maggs shouted in pain, the exclamation muffled through his mask, and thumped down. Fezcko double-checked the seal on his mask, jumped inside. A round crashed into the wall beside him. Damn it. He dropped to the floor, tried to get oriented through the smoke. He could hear the guy coughing but could not see him. Maddening. He crawled across the room and lay next to Maggs, who pointed at his right leg. Blood puddled underneath the calf. Maggs made a snapping motion with his hands, indicating that the shot had broken his fibula or his knee, Fezcko couldnt tell. Fezcko pointed toward the door. Lets go; well wait him out but Maggs shook his head. Then something dark flew out of the white smoke, twirling toward them. Grenade. Fezcko tried to squirm away and realized he was looking at a pistol. The gun clattered at his feet. He grabbed it, racked the slide, checked the clip. Empty. A man stood up, wraithlike through the smoke, hands in the air. Maggs raised his M-4 and was about to shoot, but Fezcko pushed the gun down. The man coughed violently, his body shaking with each breath. He stepped toward them slowly, one hesitant foot after the next. He was surrendering. Either that or trying to get close enough to them to blow a suicide-bomb belt. But the belts were thick and obvious, and this guy was wearing only a T-shirt. So Fezcko let him get within five feet and then popped up and grabbed him. He shoved the guy out the back door and wrestled him down to the pebbled lot behind the house. The guy landed face-first, and all the air went out of him. Fezcko grabbed his bushy black hair and ground his face into the rocky soil. Then he chopped the guy three times in the neck for what hed done to Maggs. Also to make sure he wouldnt be any trouble. Though the guy didnt look like much of a threat. He was shaking, and a trail of spittle covered his thin black beard. And he was young, maybe seventeen. But he had been popping off at them with that snubnose. Fezcko patted the guy down and flex-cuffed his ankles so he couldnt run and turned back to grab Maggs. But Maggs had already crawled out and was leaning against the side of the house on his good leg. The smoke inside was thinning, and the action had eased. No one was shooting, and the ISI men were yelling at one another in Punjabi as they cleared rooms on the second floor. Fezcko pulled off his mask. Hows your leg? Maggs shrugged. No marine crap, Fezcko said. If youre bleeding out, Id like to know. Ill live. Lucky my running-back days are over, Maggs said. And lucky he only had a .22. Shoulda let me shoot him. Next time. In the corner of the lot, the second captive lay on his stomach. The guys nose and mouth were foaming, and Fezcko wondered if hed gone overboard on the CS. He pulled off Maggs belt and dragged the prisoner to his feet. The guys face was slack, his eyes wild and red. Fezcko mopped him up with a corner of his shirt. And realized he was looking at Jawaruddin bin Zari. . . HE FROG-MARCHED BIN ZARI to Maggs. Got my belt. Thats not all. Maggs took another look at the slumped-over mess in the jean jacket. Is that I believe it is. Maggs raised a hand and they high-fived. Juvenile, maybe, but Fezcko didnt care. Theyd just caught one of the most wanted men in Pakistan. A breeze picked up, dragging tendrils of the CS in their direction. Fezcko caught a whiff and began to cough. After a few seconds the breeze faded, but he kept coughing, until the cough turned into a laugh. He sat down beside Maggs. What? Maggs said finally. Been one hell of a going-away party, hasnt it? Ten minutes later, the smoke had cleared enough to allow Fezcko to enter the house without his mask. Six jihadis had been in the house when the raid started. Four were dead. Khans squad had shot two on the ground floor, the others on the stairs. In turn, Khan had taken four casualties, one dead, three seriously wounded. Not how we planned it, Fezcko said to Khan. I should like to know who tipped them. Maybe our new friend can tell us. How will you explain whats happened to your squad? Leave that to me. Just promise, if you get anything from these monkeys, youll pass it on. Done. . . THEY PUT HOODS ON the prisoners and threw them into the back of Khans van and rolled into the dark. By sunrise they would be halfway to Faisalabad. Before noon the plane would be at the airport, and by sunset bin Zari and the second prisoner would be somewhere over the Black Sea. After that... they would be in Gods hands. Gods, and the agencies. PART ONE ISAN FRANCISCO. PRESENT DAY A chauffeur. Thats what Jack Fisher was, when you came right down to it. A chauffeur. He didnt mind, not too much. When the new administration came in, he read the politics like everybody else. The rules were changing. The lawyers were putting their noses everywhere. Anybody too close to the black stuff might have a tough time. And hed been close. Very, very close. And things had gotten messy at the end, for sure. But nobody could say they hadnt gotten the goods in the Midnight House. So be it. Let the big brains weigh what theyd done, the pros and cons, the morality of it. Fisher didnt have an opinion. He wasnt a big brain. He slept fine. No bad dreams. Even if Rachel Callar had tried to give him some of hers. And look what had happened to her.

Fisher didnt have much sympathy. As far as he was concerned, she was a coward whod gotten what she deserved. But, Callar aside, after the freedom theyd had, he wasnt planning to ask some twenty-eight-year-old lawyer Mother may I? when he wanted to make a detainee stand up straight. Nope. Not interested. So Fisher quit, took the deal they were offering, the extra severance and the enhanced pension. A lot of the guys in 673 had reached the same conclusion. Which was probably how Langley and the Pentagon wanted it. Even with the pension and the severance, staying retired wasnt an option for Fisher. Not with two ex-wives sucking him dry. He thought about working security for a company like General Electric or Boeing. Would have taken him about two days to get a job. The multinationals couldnt get enough former CIA operatives. But after twenty years of working for the government, Fisher didnt want to swap one bureaucracy for another. He wanted to work for himself for a change. And live in California, like he always said he would. Hed grown up in backwoods Maine, a crummy little town called Caribou, halfway between Canada and nowhere. Some of his friends liked the winters, hockey and skiing cross-country, but Fisher wasnt one of them. For as long as he could remember, hed thought of California as the promised land. He printed up some fancy business cards: Jack B. Fisher, Fisher Security Consulting. Moved to Berkeley with wife number three. And rented an office in the Mission, a formerly down-and-out neighborhood in south San Francisco that was now as fat and happy as the rest of the city. Fisher figured hed start with freelance work for guys he knew at Kroll and Brinker. Jobs that were too small for them, too messy, that pushed the limits of the legal. He wouldnt mind those jobs. In fact, hed like them. He took out ads on late-night local cable and posted on Craigslist and waited for the calls to come in. But with the economy lousy, business was slower than hed expected. After a couple months, he wondered if he might wind up at GE after all. Then this gig dropped into his lap. He was sitting in his office, trying to think of ways to get his name out, when his cell phone buzzed. He didnt recognize the caller ID. He answered anyway. He always answered. Couldnt afford to piss off any potential customers. Hed probably work for his exes, if theyd hire him. Ex number one, anyway. Number two was a real piece of work. Jack? Its Vince. Heatley. Fisher had gotten into a small-time poker game, mostly dollar-ante stud, with a bunch of retired FBI agents. Vince Heatley was a regular, former special-agent-in-charge of the San Jose office, now running security for George Lucas. Heatley was a solid guy, tight-assed for Fishers taste but no worse than the average Fed. He usually lost a little but didnt seem to mind. Which probably meant he had money. Free for a drink? Heatley said. If youre buying, Fisher said. And wished he hadnt. He sounded desperate. Meet me at the Four Seasons. . . OVER A COUPLE OF beers, Heatley outlined the deal. Ever heard of Rajiv Jyoti? Fisher shook his head. Hes a VC, Vince said. Hes Vietnamese? Sounds Indian. You really are new in town. No, a venture capitalist. You know, they invest in tech companies, start-ups. Rajiv was early in Google. Hes worth maybe a billion now, a billion-two. Depends on the day. Nice. Hes looking for a new head of security. And he loves ex-govs. FBI, military. Hed probably get hard just at the idea of a CIA op. What happened to the guy who was working for him? Gone to work for Larry Ellison. The CEO of a company called Oracle. Ive heard of it, Fisher said, though he hadnt. Ellisons richer than Rajiv. Heck only Mormons and FBI agents said heck instead of hell, Fisher thought. Ellisons richer than just about everybody. Point is, Rajivs friends with George, and hes been bitching to George about needing a new guy. George asked me if I had any ideas. I thought of you. You seem solid, and I know your business. I mean, I know the economy isnt great. Personal security. Not exactly what Fisher had imagined when he quit Langley. You might like it. Someone like Lucas, these Star Wars fans get freaky about him. He really needs the protection. But Rajiv, outside San Francisco, nobodys even heard of him. Probably hes never gotten a threat in his life. He likes the idea of having somebody around, is all. The job sounded less and less appealing. Whats he like? Fisher said. These guys all have egos, but from what I see, hes low-key, better than average. You wouldnt have to live at his house, anything like that. Fisher sipped his beer. Ill think about it. Before you say no, the moneys great. Rajiv told George he was paying his old guy two and a quarter a year. Now he figures hes got to up that. I think for you, if he likes you, he might go to two-seven-five. Two hundred seventy-five thousand dollars. The rent on Fishers office was five grand a month, every month. And the electricity, and the insurance, and the phone. And the alimony. Never forget the alimony. His exes sure didnt. Suddenly, working for a venture capitalist didnt seem so bad. You think hell like me? Heatley coughed into his hand. Before I called you, I checked in with a couple guys I know at your shop. You backgrounded me? Guess Im not surprised. Anyway, I dont think you should have any problems. So? Interested? Maybe, Fisher said. Long as I dont have to walk the dog. . . AND HE DIDNT. JYOTI was all right. Not exactly a bundle of laughs but quiet and even-tempered. He spent most of his time tapping away on his iPhone. Plus, the job came with a few perks. Billionaires hung together. Fisher went to a party on

Ellisons yacht, The Rising Sun. Yacht wasnt even the right word. The thing was a cruise ship. Five hundred feet long. He met Arnold Schwarzenegger at a fund-raiser and sat with Mark Cuban at a Warriors game.

Jyoti even leased him a car, a beautiful silver Lexus LX600h sport-utility, by far the nicest vehicle that Fisher had ever driven. The work wasnt tough, either. So far, Jyoti had called Fisher at home only twice. Once on Halloween, when kids egged the gate of his mansion in Sea Cliff. The second time after his wifes poodle escaped. No kidnapping, no extortion, not even any stealing by the housekeepers. Fishers biggest complaint was that the job was too easy. He hated being bored. He figured hed work for Jyoti another year or two, until hed saved a couple hundred grand and the economy turned up, then go back out on his own. Or maybe work for Halliburton in someplace like Nigeria for a couple of years. Though his wife would have a fit. Not that it mattered. Hed never been too good at listening to women. But Jyoti did have some quirks. The most annoying was his insistence that Fisher come to Sea Cliff every morning to pick him up for the drive to his office in Atherton, in Silicon Valley, twenty miles south of San Francisco. Jyoti said he liked the certainty of knowing that Fisher would be outside his house every morning. He said the drive would give them a chance to talk over the days security arrangements. Fisher knew the truth. The truth was that Jyoti liked having a former CIA agent drive him to work. So Fisher was a chauffeur. And that didnt bother him. Okay, maybe it did. A bit. But for two hundred seventy-five thousand dollars a year, plus medical and dental and a one-hundred-thousand-dollar hybrid, he would suck it up. Sometimes he wondered what the guys from 673 his old unit would make of his new gig. They knew he was in San Francisco. Hed even told a couple of them he was working for a billionaire, though hed made the job more interesting than it really was, hinting he had gotten into high-stakes corporate espionage. And here he was, at 7:05, parked outside Jyotis front gate. Ten minutes early. Jyoti was precise. If he said 7:15, he meant 7:15. He expected the people who worked for him to be precise as well. Fisher didnt mind. Hed never needed much sleep. He got up at 5:15 and was out of the house by 6:00 to head over the Bay Bridge and into San Francisco. Assuming he didnt hit any accidents, he usually had time to stop for a smoothie and a coffeenobacon and eggs for him, not anymore. Of course, by the time he reached the mansion, the smoothie and the coffee had to be gone. Jyoti didnt like food in the car, especially not in the morning. He liked what he called a sterile environment. No crumbs, no newspapers, no radio except NPR on low. Nothing except a bottle of chilled Fiji water in the center console. After eight months with the guy, Fisher had reached the considered opinion that Jyoti was kind of a puss. Still. Two hundred seventy-five thousand dollars. . . IN FRONT OF THE gate of Jyotis mansion, Fisher cut the engine. Global warming, Jack, Jyoti had said. We must conserve where we can. Fisher had restrained himself from pointing out that Jyoti could save even more gas by trading in the six-thousand-pound Lexus for a smaller ride to work. Billionaires didnt appreciate back talk. Jyoti had one other quirk. He insisted that Fisher be armed. So Fisher dusted off his old Glock and got himself a concealed-weapons permit. Even Berkeley could hardly deny that a former CIA agent might have a legitimate need for protection. Jyotis mansion sat on two acres in Sea Cliff, probably the most exclusive neighborhood in San Francisco. It didnt look like much from the front, flat and wide and two stories high. But the property opened onto a priceless view of the Pacific and the Golden Gate Bridge. Though maybe priceless wasnt the right word. Fisher had checked the property records, found that the place was assessed for 21.5 million dollars. It had a squash court and a pool. The rooms were stuffed with high-end Indian art, bronze Buddhas and paintings of fierce-looking gods. Jyoti knew how to live, Fisher gave him that much. He knew how to stay married, too. His wife wasnt much of a looker, but he seemed devoted to her, never even checked out other women. Fisher would have to ask him the secret sometime. Seven ten. Another cool San Francisco morning, fifty-five degrees with a touch of fog. By mid-afternoon the city would be in the low seventies, the Valley a bit warmer. Perfect for a hike or a mountain-bike ride. Fisher had seen the first biker of the day go by just a couple of minutes before, headed up the hill toward Golden Gate Park, then turning out of sight. Fisher took a quick check of the Lexus, making sure it was clean, no papers or receipts in sight, the leather in the front passenger seat showroom-new. Jyoti liked to sit up front with him, his nod to Fishers equality. Fisher appreciated the gesture. He would have appreciated even more not driving the guy to work. . . HIS CELL PHONE RANG. A blocked number. He looked at it, decided not to answer. He didnt want to be on the phone when Jyoti showed up. He sent the call to voice mail and tucked the phone away. A few seconds later, it rang again. Blocked again. Strange. He flipped the phone open. Hello. Jack. The voice was unfamiliar, eerily high-pitched. Fisher wondered if they had a lousy connection or if the guy was disguising his voice. Jack Fisher. Whos this? Silence. Fisher hung up. He looked at his phone irritably, as though it were a misbehaving dog. For the third time, the phone rang. Jack Fisher? Again the unnatural voice. Fisher

reflexively slid his hand toward his shoulder holster, then realized he couldn't hold the phone and grab the pistol. He stayed with the phone. Who am I speaking with? Look to your right. At the house. Fisher leaned right, looked out the passenger-side window. Nothing. Suddenly he knew he was in trouble. Gun. Now. He dropped the phone on the passenger seat. He reached his right hand across his body, trying for his shoulder holster. And a tap on the driver's-side window twisted him back. No. A pistol. With a silencer screwed to the barrel. A gloved hand held the gun and he'd fallen for it. Look right. He should have looked left, why hadn't he looked left? He couldn't die like this, it was impossible, not now, not as a goddamn chauffeur. He didn't hear the bullet, and he didn't see it, of course. But he felt it, a rush of fire in his lungs. His training told him he had to go for his pistol. The pistol was his only hope. But the pain was too much, especially when a second bullet joined the first, this one on the left side of his chest, tearing a hole in his aorta. Suddenly Fisher felt an agony he could never have imagined, his heart clutching helplessly, unable to pump, crying its bitterness with each half-finished beat. Fisher screamed but found that the sound he made wasn't a scream at all, merely a whimper from high in his throat. His head flopped forward. His tongue lolled out. The world in front of the windshield raced away from him, as if he'd somehow put the car in reverse at a million miles an hour. The door to the Lexus was pulled open. Fisher sagged sideways in the seat. Already the pain in his chest was fading. But he wasn't dying quickly enough for whoever was holding the gun. Fisher felt the touch of the silencer against his temple. He turned his head, tried to pull it away, but the pistol followed him. He knew now he would die. He wasn't even afraid, too far gone for that. In the fading twilight of his consciousness, he understood he was being mocked. The shooter wanted him to know he was dying as helplessly as a lobster boiling in a too-small pot. Even so, Fisher wished he could understand why death had found him this way, wished someone would tell him. And so he opened his mouth and asked, or tried to ask, or imagined asking. The third shot tore open his skull and scattered his brains over the Lexus's smooth leather. The shooter looked down, making sure that Fisher was dead. Unscrewed the silencer and tucked away the pistol. Looked up and down the empty street. Noticed the phone on the passenger seat and, the only unplanned moment in the whole operation, reached across Fisher's body and grabbed it. Switched it off so it couldn't be traced. Closed the door of the Lexus and smoothly walked away, to the mountain bike propped against a utility pole a half block down. Start to finish, including all three phone calls, the murder took barely a minute. . . . AT 7:15 PRECISELY, RAJIV Jyoti walked out of his front gate, tapping away on his iPhone. He reached for the door. Then he looked at Fisher. And screamed and dropped his phone and trotted shakily around the Lexus. He opened the door carefully, even in his distress wanting to be sure that none of Fisher's blood wound up on his six-hundred-dollar hand-tailored pants. Jyoti wasn't a doctor, but he could see that Fisher was beyond help. He looked at the body and up and down the empty street, wondering why no one had heard the shots, wondering if whoever had killed Fisher would be coming back for him, wondering if he had been the real target. The seconds stretched on and still Jyoti stood motionless, until the drip of blood on the pavement shocked him to life. He ran back into his front yard, slammed the gate shut, and ran into the house. Then, finally, he dialed 911. 2 MOUNT ADAMS, NEW HAMPSHIRE Revue de presse [A] bullet-paced, psychologically engaging tale." --The New York Times A refreshing hero, the anti-Jack Bauer Cinematic firefights and fistcuffs. --St. Petersburg Times Arguably Berenson's best thriller yet. --Library Journal