

"Blows the competition away!" —Brad Thor

# EYE FOR AN EYE

A DEWEY ANDREAS NOVEL

# BEN COES

AUTHOR OF *THE LAST REFUGE*

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EYE FOR  
AN EYE

BEN COES

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS  NEW YORK

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To Oscar,  
the Navy SEAL of nine-year-old boys

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I will make my arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh.

—DEUTERONOMY 32:4

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Also by Ben Coes

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# Prologue

UPPER PHILLIMORE GARDENS  
KENSINGTON  
LONDON, UK  
ONE WEEK AGO

“I don’t know.”

The three words Amit Bhutta, Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations, had repeated for the past day and a half, three words that Dewey listened to with a blank look on his face. It was, by his rough count, approximately the thousandth time Bhutta had said them.

He and Tacoma had been taking turns interrogating Bhutta. Two hours on, two off. They had distinctly different styles. Tacoma, the former SEAL, was less patient. Bhutta’s bloody face showed the practical implications of that impatience. Dewey assumed it was Tacoma’s youth that made him slap the Iranian around. Not that he cared. But his style was different. With Bhutta, Dewey felt that screwing with his head had a better shot at getting them the information they needed. That and not feeding or giving Bhutta anything to drink.

The interrogation room was located in the basement of Rolf Borchardt’s mansion in Kensington. The room was soundproof and windowless. At the center of the room, a steel table was bolted to the wooden floor. Behind it was a steel chair, also bolted down. The table had wet blood on it, not for the first time.

A lamp in the corner provided the only light.

Bhutta was stooped over, leaning forward, his cheek pressed against the steel table. His left eye was shut, black and blue.

The heat inside the room was cranked up. Both men were sweating, but Bhutta, with his wrists shackled behind his back—and the muzzle of Dewey’s Colt M1911 aimed at his head—was sweating a little more.

It had been a week since Dewey infiltrated Iran and stole the country’s first nuclear device. Dewey’s disguise, his overgrown beard and moustache, were gone now. His face was clean-shaven, his hair was cut to a medium length.

When Dewey asked to borrow a pair of scissors to cut it himself, Borchardt insisted on taking him to a Belgrave Road stylist. Now Dewey looked like a model, ripped from the advertising pages of *Vanity Fair*, though the savageness which the professional photographers endeavored to manufacture in their models was, on Dewey, real. His unruly brown hair was combed back; his eyes were bright

cold, and blue; his large nose was sharp and aquiline, despite the fact that it had been busted on two separate occasions. Dewey didn't think about his looks. Truth be told, he didn't like the way he looked. He didn't like attention. Dewey preferred blending in, remaining anonymous. Today, with no stubble on his face, a tan, and a \$450 haircut, it was not hard to see why the thirty-nine-year-old American could still turn heads.

Yet, as Bhutta had learned over thirty-six hours of interrogation, there lurked something beneath the attractive veneer of the kid from Castine, Maine. It was a toughness, a coldness, an anger deep inside. Most who knew Dewey Andreas thought that anger had been forged by the long, bitter winters of his youth along the Maine coast, or on the unforgiving football fields of Boston College, or still later, during Ranger school, or in the otherworldly trials that separated warriors from mere men called 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment—Delta—along with the Navy SEALs, America's most fearsome Special Forces soldiers.

Only Dewey knew it was none of the above, that what had hardened him was the morning he had watched his six-year-old son die of leukemia so long ago. That was what made him, when necessary, ruthless. It was also what kept Dewey, in the innermost part of his being, just, fair, flawed, and vulnerable—human.

Even Bhutta could see the toughness now, as he stared at the American. It was the same meanness and detachment that had probably coursed in the blood of the men who so long ago had kicked the crap out of the British, a determination that, to the Iranian's mind at least, was as defeating as anything he'd ever experienced.

"What's his name?" asked Dewey.

"I told you, I don't know. He's China's asset."

Dewey was seated in a beat-up, torn leather club chair. He had his right leg draped over the right arm.

"What's his name?"

"Fuck you."

"What's his name?"

"I don't know."

"Ambassador Bhutta, we can do this all night."

"I don't know, asshole."

Dewey smiled.

"Language," said Dewey.

"Fuck you."

"If your mother could hear you swearing, she'd be really fucking pissed."

Bhutta's mouth flared slightly, nearly a smile.

"You laughed."

"Fuck you," Bhutta whispered. "You're not funny."

"Then why'd you laugh?"

“I wasn’t laughing.”

“Okay, I have one for you,” said Dewey. “What do you do if an Iranian throws a pin at you?”

Bhutta paused, then finally relented.

“What?” he asked.

“Run like hell.”

“Why?”

“Because he’s got a grenade between his teeth.”

Bhutta laughed.

“You’re worse than the other guy,” whispered Bhutta, shaking his head. “That’s stupid. Just beat the shit out of me, will you?”

Dewey laughed, then pumped the trigger on his .45. The bullet struck Bhutta’s right kneecap, blowing it to shreds. Blood sprayed onto the wall. Bhutta screamed, lurching against the chair, pulling at the shackles.

“Jesus, I didn’t think it would hurt that much,” said Dewey.

Bhutta turned and looked at Dewey, a horrible grimace on his face. His knee was bleeding profusely.

*“I don’t know his name! How would I know China has a mole inside Mossad?”*

Dewey ran his fingers back through his hair.

“Here’s the deal,” said Dewey, wiping the muzzle of the gun on his jeans. “You can either tell me the name of the mole, or you can tell Menachem Dayan and those nice fellas at the madhouse. I haven’t been feeling their jokes aren’t going to be as funny as mine. Also, they’ll kill you. After they dunk your head in water a few hundred times.”

Bhutta screamed again.

“You tell me the name, and the only one who gets hurt is the mole,” Dewey said. “You go free. We can arrange some sort of relocation program inside the United States. Some sunny state.”

Bhutta’s face was pale and drenched in sweat.

“What about my daughter?” asked Bhutta, tears streaming down his face.

“Her too.”

“What about my knee?” asked Bhutta, in agony.

“It can go too.”

“Fuck you!” Bhutta howled. “You know what I mean.”

Dewey sat up and aimed the gun.

“No, not again. I want something in writing. An affidavit from the CIA or the Justice Department.”

“Not going to happen. If you want me to choose between shooting your kneecap off or calling some lawyer at Langley and explaining why I haven’t already dumped you off to the Israelis like I was supposed to, all I can say is, that ain’t gonna fuckin’ happen.”

“You’re a bastard.”

“Yeah, I am,” said Dewey. “But if I say I’m going to do something, I’m going to do it. Tell me the

name of China's spy inside Mossad."

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"Fuck you."

Dewey stood up, then chambered another round. He aimed the gun at Bhutta's left knee.

"No!" Bhutta screamed. He looked at Dewey. "Dillman. His name is Dillman. That's all I know."

Tell me you won't fuck me over."

Dewey stuck the Colt M1911 in his shoulder holster and walked to the door.

"I never break a promise."

Dewey walked down the hallway and pulled out his cell.

"Get me Menachem Dayan," he said into the phone as he walked upstairs.

A moment later, Dewey heard the raspy cough of Israel's top military commander, General Menachem Dayan.

"Hello, Dewey."

"I finished interrogating Bhutta," Dewey said. "I know the name of China's mole inside Mossad."

"Who is it?" asked Dayan.

"I want your word, General," said Dewey. "Kohl Meir gets to put the bullet in him. Then he's buried."

"You have my word."

"His name's Dillman."

MOSSAD SPECIAL UNIT, AKA "THE MADHOUSE"  
TEL AVIV, ISRAEL

Dayan stepped into Fritz Lavine's sixth-floor corner office, which overlooked the Mediterranean Sea, the U.S. embassy, and downtown Tel Aviv. Lavine was the director general of Mossad, Israel's intelligence service. He was a tall, rotund man with receding brown hair and big ruddy cheeks pockmarked with acne scars. Dressed in a white button-down shirt, sleeves rolled up, he stood behind his desk, inspecting a sheet of paper. Two men were seated in chairs in front of Lavine's desk: Cooperman, Mossad chief of staff; and Rolber, head of clandestine operations.

All three turned as Dayan entered, slamming the door behind him.

"What the *fuck* happened?" asked Dayan as he crossed the office, his voice deep, charred by decades' worth of cigarettes. "How many years did you three work with this son of a bitch traitor and you never suspected a goddamn thing?"

"There'll be plenty of time for blame, Menachem," said Lavine, icily. "Right now, we need to find this motherfucker and put a bullet in his head before he does any more damage and before he escapes."

"What *is* the damage?"

"It's extensive," said Cooperman. "So far, we can trace the exposure of at least sixteen MI6 and CIA operatives back to Dillman. As for Mossad, the number appears to be seven dead agents."

"Jesus Christ," Dayan whispered, looking in disbelief at Cooperman.

"TGI succeeded in rebuilding Dillman's digital biograph, correspondence, you name it," said Lavine angrily, throwing the paper down on his desk. "He gave the Chinese everything. Every Far East operation we conducted over the past decade was known ahead of time by Fao Bhang and the ministry. Their knowledge was so extensive that it appears they even tolerated certain activities inside China as not to raise suspicion. Dillman passed on detailed aspects of anything Langley supplied to us. That includes nuclear infrastructure."

Dayan walked to the glass and looked for a few brief seconds toward the U.S. embassy.

"Have we notified Calibrisi?" asked Dayan, referring to the CIA director, Hector Calibrisi.

Lavine nodded. "Chalmers too," he added, referring to Derek Chalmers, head of MI6.

"And what was the reaction?" asked Dayan.

Lavine stared back at Dayan but remained silent. He didn't need to say anything. They all knew Dillman had set all three agencies back years, decades even, and that both London and Langley would

be extremely angry.

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Dayan shook his head. He sat down in one of the chairs in front of Lavine's desk.

"Where is he?" asked Dayan, calmer now, his hand rubbing the bridge of his nose, eyes closed.

"We don't know," said Rolber. "We're looking, carefully. If he suspects anything, he'll run."

"If he goes to China, we'll never see him again," said Dayan.

The phone on Lavine's desk chimed, then a voice came on the speaker.

"Director, they're waiting for you."

"Patch us in."

The phone clicked.

"Hector?" asked Lavine.

"Hey, Fritz," said Calibrisi on speaker. "You have me and Bill Polk here at Langley along with

Piper Redgrave and Jim Bruckheimer at NSA."

"MI6 is on also," said Derek Chalmers, in a British accent. "Where are we on this?"

"We have nothing," said Lavine. "We're looking everywhere. Last contact with the agency was two days ago. General Redgrave, has NSA developed anything?"

"No," came the female voice of the head of the National Security Agency. "And to be honest, I'm not going to start using NSA assets on Dillman, or on anything else, until we make damn sure our systems and protocols haven't been contaminated by this mole. If the Chinese are inside NSA, we have bigger problems than Dillman."

"What's the plan if and when we do find him?" asked Calibrisi.

"We have three options," said Rolber. "One—we watch him, use him, plot an architecture of disinformation back into Beijing. Two—we bring him in, interrogate him, then let him rot. Three—termination."

"Why not two and three?" asked Calibrisi. "Grill him then kill him."

"If we bring him in, China will find out, Hector," said Cooperman. "There has to be some form of check-in and tip-off. If he misses that check-in, Fao Bhang will immediately try to exfiltrate him, or more likely, just kill him."

"Then Bhang will move on Western assets before we have time to clean up inside the theater," said Chalmers. "Every MI6, CIA, Mossad agent in China will die, not to mention anyone else Dillman has exposed. It will be a bloody mess."

"It already is a bloody mess," said Dayan.

"So what about option one?" asked Calibrisi. "What would the design look like?"

"We locate him then hang back," answered Rolber, "carefully monitor his movements, and tightly control information flow to him. In the meantime, we put our assets in the Chinese theater on high alert and prepare for exfiltration. When Dillman is no longer useful to us, or he suspects something, we bring out our teams, then bring him in. We can shoot him later."

"Fuck that," yelled Dayan, hitting the desk with his hand. "We're not waiting. Dillman dies right now. Period, end of statement. If I have to do it myself in downtown Shanghai with a dull butter knife

this motherfucker dies.”

“Dillman is just a symptom, General,” said Calibrisi. “It’s Fao Bhang who’s behind it all.”

“Then let’s kill that son of a bitch too.”

“Nothing would please me more, but we’ve never had a shot at him,” said Calibrisi. “Bhang doesn’t travel outside the People’s Republic of China. He hasn’t been seen in the West since 1998. Inside PRC, forget it. He’s as well guarded as the premier.”

“Let’s cut our losses and kill Dillman,” said Dayan. “I’m not a fan of fancy intelligence operations—double agents, disinformation, whatnot. They never work. We’re seeing firsthand how they get a fucked up. It’s time to clean up this mess and tie it off. As for Bhang, we’re wasting our time. The man’s a ghost. Let’s focus on what we can do, namely kill what has to be the most important intelligence asset Bhang possesses in the West. That’s at least something.”

“I have an idea,” said Chalmers.

“Go ahead, Derek,” said Lavine, picking up an unlit cigar stub from his desk and sticking it in his mouth, then looking at Dayan.

“Even before this Dillman episode, Fao Bhang has done damage to all of us. Bhang and the ministry are a country unto themselves. He’s the third-highest ranking member of the Chinese State Council, but he’s the most powerful by far. Premier Li fears him, as does the country’s military. His tentacles extend into China’s economic affairs. He’s been an instrumental part of the currency manipulation that has plagued Britain and, on a much more dramatic scale, the United States, for years. For all I know, his hackers are listening in right now.”

“They’re not,” said Cooperman. “I assure you of this.”

“Forgive me, but your assurances mean nothing.”

“What’s your point?” asked Lavine.

“Bhang is rising,” said Chalmers. “His malevolence grows. This is simply another chapter in a very dark book.”

There was silence in the room and over the intercom as Chalmers paused.

“My question is, when are we going to do something about it?” he asked.

“So what’s your idea?” asked Calibrisi.

“We have to find Dillman,” said Chalmers. “Obviously. Then, my suggestion is, we use him. But not in the way you’re thinking, Hector. No, instead of using him for disinformation then killing him, we’re going to switch the order around. Kill him, then use him. We’re going to lure Fao Bhang out of his hole, and Dillman is going to be our bait.”

“I’m not sure what you mean,” said Rolber.

“Bhang won’t care about the loss of one human being, even his most treasured asset in the West, but he will care if the loss of Dillman exposes him as weak, as not in control,” said Chalmers. “If we can undermine him in the terribly cutthroat drama that is Chinese leadership, it will endanger him. It will, potentially, signal those who fear Bhang or who covet his power. It’s time to destabilize Fao Bhang and let his enemies move against him. Otherwise, there will be no end to his reach and the

damage he inflicts upon the West.”

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Cooperman suddenly reached for his chest pocket and pulled out a vibrating cell phone.

“What?” he whispered into the cell.

Cooperman listened, then signaled at the phone, indicating to Lavine to mute the conference call.

“We found him,” whispered Cooperman, looking at Lavine, then Dayan and Rolber. “He’s in Haifa.”

Lavine pressed the mute button on the speakerphone.

“Haifa?” asked Lavine. “What do we have there?”

“I have a kill team in the city,” said Rolber. “Boroshevsky, Malayim. They’re good to go.”

“No,” said Dayan. “This is not Mossad’s kill.”

“You don’t trust us now, General?” demanded Rolber.

“It has nothing to do with whether or not I trust you,” said Dayan, his gravelly voice rising. “I gave my word to Andreas; it’s Kohl Meir’s kill. Get Meir up to Haifa, brief him en route, get him whatever weapons he wants. That’s an order.”

“Yes, sir.”

“In the meantime, Fritz and I will coordinate with MI6 and Langley. I’m not sure I understand what the hell Derek Chalmers is talking about, but I like it. These British always have brilliant ideas, even if their food does suck.”



DAN CARMEL HOTEL  
HAIFA, ISRAEL

Dillman walked through the lobby of the hotel, stopping outside the sliding glass doors. He stared at the rising sun, then glanced around. Like all Mossad agents, he'd been looking over his shoulder for so long it was second nature.

He was dressed in blue tennis shorts, a white shirt, and black-and-white Adidas tennis sneakers. In his hand, he held a yellow Babolat racket.

Dillman began his morning jog in the hotel driveway. He ran down the steep, winding road toward the neighborhood called Carmeliya. He ran past large stucco homes until he came to a school, then ran across the parking lot to the public tennis court. There he would hit the ball against the backboard for an hour or so, then jog back to the hotel.

As he came around the corner of the school, he was surprised to find somebody already at the backboard, hitting tennis balls. Dillman thought about turning around and heading back. He didn't feel like waiting God knows how long for the court.

Instead, Dillman approached the man. He was young, bearded, and scraggly-looking. He was dressed in red sweatpants, a long-sleeve gray T-shirt, topped with a yellow baseball cap and mirrored sunglasses.

The man tossed the ball up and swatted it toward the backboard. Dillman could tell by the rhythm and pace that the player was decent.

"How long will you be, my friend?" asked Dillman in Hebrew.

The player turned, raising his hands.

"I only just arrived," the man said, slightly annoyed.

"No worries," said Dillman. "I'll go for a run instead."

As Dillman started to walk away, he heard a whistle. He turned around. The tennis player waved him over.

"Would you like to hit some?" the man called from the court.

Dillman shrugged.

"Sure," he said.

They played for the better part of an hour. The stranger was good. His strokes were a little unnatural, but he was fast and was able to get to everything, despite a slight limp. He beat Dillman 6-0 in the first set. Dillman took the second 7-5. Then, in the third, the bearded stranger jumped to a 4-

lead.

In the middle of the fifth game, they both heard the string break, after the young man ripped particularly nice backhand up the line, out of Dillman's reach. Dillman welcomed the interruption. Not only was the younger man beating the crap out of him, but Dillman was sweating like a pig and hungry for breakfast.

"That's too bad," said Dillman, breathing heavily. "I guess that means I win, yes?"

Dillman had been kidding, an attempt at a joke, but the stranger either didn't hear the joke or, if he had, didn't think it was funny.

"I have another racket," the man said, walking to the bench at the side of the court. Other than the score, it was the first thing the young man had said the entire match.

He unzipped his racket bag.

Dillman walked toward him as he reached into his bag.

"Are you from the area?" asked Dillman as he came up behind the stranger.

The man kept his back to Dillman as he searched inside his bag.

"No," he answered. "Tel Aviv."

"Are you a student? Do you play at the university? You're very good."

The stranger turned around and removed his sunglasses.

"No, I'm not a student," he said. "I'm in the military."

Dillman stared into the stranger's eyes. Something in his dark, brown eyes triggered Dillman's memory. Then, slowly, Dillman looked to the man's right hand. Instead of a graphite shaft there was a thick piece of wood; instead of a racket head and strings, there was the dull steel of a large ax, the kind of ax you could chop down a tree with.

"Your second serve needs some work," said the man, who Dillman now recognized: Kohl Meir. "Other than that, you're actually not bad."

Dillman lurched to run away, but Meir swung the ax, catching him in the torso. Dillman fell to the ground, gasping for air, the ax stuck in his side. The pain was so intense he couldn't even scream. His mouth went agape, his eyes bulged, and blood gushed down his chest and side.

Dillman reached desperately at the ax handle.

Calmly, Meir knelt next to him.

"You like my ax?" asked Meir, smiling. "It's for chopping the heads off traitors."

Meir stood and placed a foot on Dillman's chest then jerked up on the handle, pulling the steel head from the traitor's body. Dillman whimpered in agony. He was bleeding out, drifting into shock moments away from death.

Meir lifted the ax over his head. He swung down, burying the blade into Dillman's skull.

A white van moved slowly around the corner of the school, crawling toward Meir. The van stopped a few feet from the corpse. Meir watched as the back of the van opened and two men in blue uniforms climbed out.

The Mossad cleanup crew jogged forward, placing a stretcher next to Dillman's blood-soaked

corpse.

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“One thing,” Meir said.

“Yes, commander.”

“Don’t touch the ax,” he ordered.

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RESIDENCE OF THE PREMIER  
ZHONGNANHAI  
BEIJING, PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC)

A small brown pony with a fluffy tan mane stood patiently in the large backyard of a simple red building with an ornately decorated roof. At least twenty school girls gathered in front of the pony, waiting their turn.

It was a balmy Saturday afternoon at the official residence of the premier of China, Qishan Li, who was elevated three years ago. Li's face sported a large smile as he watched his granddaughter, Meixiu, climb atop the animal. Her friends all clapped loudly and screamed as Meixiu moved the pony away from the house.

The crowd in the backyard included Meixiu's classmates from the private all-girls school she attended, their parents, and an assortment of other well-wishers, staff members, and sycophants. Li adored his granddaughter, and his annual birthday party for her was a well-known event. It was a chance not only for Meixiu and her friends and family to celebrate, but an opportunity for Chinese politicians and ministers to curry favor with the premier by giving the young girl elaborate gifts.

Meixiu had opened all of them, and the back terrace was cluttered with gifts: bright sweaters, jewelry, toys, shoes, flowers, and a hundred other items large and small, stacked on tables for the guests to admire.

A half mile away, a dark blue delivery van pulled up to Xinhua Gate. The driver lowered the window and handed his ID to one of the armed soldiers guarding the entrance.

The soldier inspected the identification. The driver was from the Ministry of State Security.

"Who is it for?"

"The girl," said the driver. "A present from Minister Bhang."

The soldier passed his ministry ID back to him and nodded to another soldier to let the van through the gates.

The van moved at a placid speed through the massive multibuilding compound that served as the central headquarters for the Chinese government, including the Communist Party and the State Council. Pretty trees and manicured lawns separated the ancient, beautifully maintained buildings. Every few hundred yards stood an armed soldier or two. The van stopped outside Li's residence. The driver climbed out of the van as a pair of armed soldiers in paramilitary gear crossed the front lawn in front of the house.

The driver opened the back of the van. All three men stood and stared inside. Sitting in the back was a lone object, a large brown shiny-new Louis Vuitton trunk with a pink ribbon wrapped garishly around it, then tied in a bow.

“It’s heavy,” said the driver. “Give me a hand, will you?”

The three men lifted the trunk and carried it across the lawn. Another guard, this one in plain clothes, opened the front door.

They carried the trunk through the house. At the door to the outside terrace, Li’s wife caught the sight of the three men, then let out a delighted laugh.

“What have we here?” she yelled in a high-pitched giggle.

“From Minister Bhang, madam,” said the driver.

“Oh, delightful,” she said, waving them toward the door. “Just delightful.”

They carried the trunk to the back lawn amid excited *oohs* and *aaahs*. Meixiu, still atop the pony, let out a squeal as she suddenly saw the present being set down on the lawn. She practically jumped from the pony and ran across the grass to the trunk.

A bright yellow envelope was taped to the top of the trunk.

“To Meixiu,” said Meixiu, reading the note aloud as Li and his wife stood at the young girl’s side surrounded by the rest of the children and adults. “On this, the happiest of days, happy birthday to you from Minister Fao Bhang.”

Li glanced at his wife, a slightly confounded smile on his face.

“Who is that, Grandfather?” asked Meixiu.

“Just someone I work with,” said Li.

“What a kind gesture,” said Li’s wife.

“May I open it?” asked Meixiu, a huge smile of excitement on her face.

“Of course,” bellowed Li, gleefully.

The girl pulled one end of the ribbon and let it fall to the ground. She unclasped the two buckles on the front of the trunk, then lifted it up.

At first there were smiles and shouts of delight, as many people didn’t understand what it was they were seeing. Then came the silence, as smiles disappeared. Finally, there was the scream, the first one from Meixiu herself, a piercing yelp of a scream that ripped the air. Her scream was soon joined by others from her grandmother, schoolmates, and everyone else within sight of the trunk.

Inside the trunk was the body of a dead man, stuffed unnaturally into the trunk, dressed in tennis shorts, a tennis shirt, covered in a flood of dried blood and mucus. In the middle of the man’s head was an ax, which had been hacked deep into the skull.

As Meixiu suddenly vomited and everyone else scrambled to leave amid a chorus of quiet hysterical cries, Li turned calmly to one of the plainclothed security men.

“Return this to the ministry,” said Li as he reached for his chest and tried to control his anger. “Then tell Fao Bhang I want to see him immediately.”

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MINISTRY OF STATE SECURITY  
BEIJING

“Do you recognize him, sir?”

Fao Bhang, China’s minister of State Security, the top intelligence official in China, stared at the mangled corpse. It was stuffed like a side of beef into the Louis Vuitton trunk. The smell was overwhelming, but the pungent aroma didn’t stop Bhang from looking. The dead man had on tennis sneakers, shorts, and what had been a white tennis shirt. A long gash had been cleaved into the torso, at least a foot long and four inches wide. His ribs were visible. The skin around the gash was swollen, up, septic and rotting. From the man’s skull, a large ax jutted out, the ax head embedded deep into the dead man’s forehead. At the nape of the neck, a silver Star of David lay still, attached to a thin necklace.

\* \* \*

Bhang had met Dillman more than a decade before. Bhang had been sent to Israel to kill a Chinese dissident hiding out in a Jerusalem tenement. The operation had gone flawlessly; it would be a one-day hit; in and out, bragging rights back at the ministry. But it had gone awry at the airport. They stopped him; his cover had been blown somehow.

Within hours Bhang was tied up and sweating in a Mossad interrogation house, located in a quiet Tel Aviv suburb called Savyon. Dillman was his interrogator. He was Mossad’s deputy chief operating officer, and Bhang recognized him immediately.

“Welcome to Israel, Fao,” Dillman had said. “Did you finish the job on the old man? A seventy-four-year-old with arthritis. That must have been pretty hard, yes?”

Then, the words that changed it all, that changed everything. And they came from Bhang’s mouth, as if from a ventriloquist.

“We’ll pay you fifty million dollars to spy for China,” Bhang had said to Dillman. “Agree, promise to set me free, and it will be wired within the hour.”

He’d guessed, correctly as it turned out, that it needed to be an awe-inspiring number. Anything less, and the Israeli wouldn’t have done it. The ministry had paid Dillman the \$50 million and at least another \$50 million over the years. In return, Dillman had been a virtual treasure trove of information, not only about Israel, but America too.

The turning of the high-ranking Israeli had propelled Bhang upward within the ministry. He bathed

in the reflected glory of the mole's revelations.

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\* \* \*

"Dillman," said Bhang, looking at the corpse, at rest in the trunk.

"Are you sure, sir?"

Bhang did not answer or show any emotion, as he stared at the dead Israeli.

\* \* \*

Fao Bhang did not like idle talk. In fact, on the day when Bhang was elevated to his leadership post at the Ministry of State Security, leapfrogging over more than a dozen more senior officers who were, on paper, more experienced than him, Premier Zicheng had remarked, "Fao, you seem more like a librarian than a spy."

Bhang, in typical fashion, had not responded, except to nod a humble thank-you. Premier Zicheng then presented him the Order of the Lotus—the ministry's highest honor. Bhang was appointed, at the age of forty-three, to arguably the third most powerful position in China.

Only Bhang knew that Zicheng's remark really could not have been further from the truth. It demonstrated a critical lack of understanding about him, another underestimation of his abilities, his strengths, and his cunning. In order to claim the ministry's top office, Bhang had engineered a bold and highly ruthless plot. Over the course of a year, he had systematically destroyed the one man standing in his way, Xiangou, his boss, mentor, and caretaker. Machiavelli himself would have cringed in fear.

It had all begun with a phone call from Bhang's half brother. Bo Minh was an electrical engineer by training, who'd started at the ministry at the same time as Bhang. But whereas Bhang had political ambitions, Minh was more interested in the obtuse recesses of abstract technology. Minh became a mid-level functionary within the ministry's electronic espionage and surveillance directorate, designing devices used to listen in on enemies and allies alike, helping to arm agents with increasingly sophisticated, more-potent tools, which could be deployed in different environments across the globe and used to eavesdrop on any sort of conversation.

Minh had called Bhang past midnight, awakening him in a hotel room in Cairo, where he'd been sent to kill someone.

"I have discovered something," Minh had whispered conspiratorially.

"Why are you whispering?"

"I can't talk," whispered Minh urgently. "Listen to me. There is to be a change at the top echelon of the ministry."

Bhang had rubbed his eyes, then looked at his notebook, lying next to the bed. The word **CAIRO** was written out in bold letters. It was a habit he'd formed early on, so that in the jumbled chaos of hotels and cities he traveled to, he could wake up and know immediately where he was.

"What time is it?"

"What time is it? Did you not hear me?"

“How do you know?”

“I was testing a listening device. I had placed it in a bathroom on the seventh floor. The minister himself spoke. He must have gone into the bathroom near the cabinet room. He was alone, on a phone call. He has cancer. He is to resign within the year.”

“Did he say who he would pick as his successor?”

“Xiangou.”

A wave of electricity went down Bhang’s spine. Xiangou was Bhang’s boss, the head of the ministry’s clandestine paramilitary services bureau. He ran the kill teams. In its own way, this was good news. It meant the minister would be selecting a killer over a functionary as the next head of the ministry.

Unfortunately, Xiangou was only forty-eight years old. He would have a long career as minister, which meant Bhang’s chances of running the ministry would effectively be over.

A stark realization occurred to him then. This whole thing was, in fact, his death knell. For while Bhang was Xiangou’s protégé and the most effective assassin within the clandestine bureau’s ranks, Xiangou feared him. There wasn’t a more vicious man alive than Xiangou. As soon as he found out he was to become China’s next minister of State Security, Bhang would be dead within the hour.

“When will it happen?”

“I don’t know.”

“Don’t tell *anyone*. Do you hear me?”

“Yes, Fao.”

And so it had begun.

\* \* \*

Bhang knew he would have to design the operation outside of the architecture of the ministry. The ministry was everywhere, and any action he might contemplate involving Xiangou would be detected.

Bhang realized as he sat in that Cairo hotel room that next morning, he would need to do this off the grid.

He picked up the phone.

“Dillman.”

“Mikal, it is me, Fao.”

“Good morning, Fao. Who will the ministry be putting a bullet in today?”

“I need to see you. It’s urgent.”

“I’ll be in Brussels tomorrow. Meet me at noon at the Metropole. The room will be under Seidenberg.”

In an opulent suite at the Metropole, Bhang laid out his dilemma to Dillman. Not only did Bhang need Dillman’s ideas on how to remove Xiangou, he needed Dillman to actually do it. He needed Mossad to terminate Xiangou. Bhang couldn’t be involved. He’d asked many people to do many things over the years, but always with the threat of violence or the promise of money behind them.



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