

JAMES PATTERSON
BRENDAN DUBOIS

A man in a red coat stands on a staircase, illuminated by a strong red light. The background is a bright, hazy yellow-orange glow. The man is seen from the back, looking down the stairs.

CROSS DOWN

AN ALEX CROSS &
JOHN SAMPSON
THRILLER

JAMES PATTERSON
BRENDAN DUBOIS



CROSS DOWN

AN **ALEX CROSS &**
JOHN SAMPSON

T H R I L L E R

CROSS DOWN

**JAMES
PATTERSON**
AND BRENDAN DuBOIS



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LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

Prologue

One

IN FRONT OF President Kent and the historic Resolute Desk, General Wayne Grissom, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sits with his uniform hat in his lap and says, “Thank you for seeing me on such short notice, Mr. President.”

President Lucas Kent nods. The former Maine governor and senator is sixty, in good shape, with thick brown hair and half-frame reading glasses that he never allows the public to see him in. He’s dressed casually in gray slacks, a blue oxford button-down shirt, a red necktie.

He’s an old Yankee spirit, and he brought to the White House an insistence on saving money, which is why the Oval Office is only dimly lit, as if for a funeral, this mid-September afternoon. The heavy glass windows—bulletproof, of course—don’t allow much outside light in.

President Kent is the third president Grissom has served under since he rose to the rank of general. Grissom finds this one as smart and dedicated as the previous two. Kent pays attention to detail and has a strong bullshit detector; his personality, a mix of flattery and hardness, is typical for a political animal. This president also has the same weakness as his two predecessors: he wants to be liked by all the people he serves.

Which, Grissom thinks wryly, is a good attribute for a car salesman but not for the leader of the free world.

Earlier, when Grissom arrived at the White House—by himself, with no aides or staff—he’d noticed the change in the Secret Service detail. Outside, they were in full tactical gear, with Kevlar vests, jumpsuits, helmets, and automatic weapons, and even inside, agents in tactical gear roamed the corridors. Grissom has never seen this before.

At Grissom's request, neither the president's chief of staff, Helen Taft, nor any other presidential aides are at this Oval Office meeting. Grissom is sure Helen will raise hell about this with the president later, but that's not his concern.

Preventing leaks is his concern.

It is just the two of them. A highly unusual step, but these are dangerous and unusual times.

"Go ahead, General, please tell me what you've got," the president says.

Grissom says, "Ever since the attack on Fort Leavenworth, Army Intelligence has been aggressively working with other domestic intelligence and law enforcement agencies. We've operated within the bounds of the Posse Comitatus Act—the law barring the military from participating in civilian law—but I'll admit we've pushed those bounds. I'm sure you've received complaints about how hard we've pushed, but we didn't have much choice."

The president makes a dismissive gesture. "I've heard the complaints and I don't care. You've been doing a good job under difficult circumstances. Go on."

"Sir, since April, more than three hundred Americans have been killed and thousands more injured in these attacks."

The president sighs. "With not one demand, not one reliable or verifiable claim of responsibility. Nothing! One week it's a shooting in a Seattle office building, the next week, a pipe bomb at a supermarket in Omaha, and the week after that, poisoned bottled water given away on the streets of Manhattan."

Grissom nods. "Yes, sir, and those are just the attacks that we have concluded are originating from a terrorist organization."

The president pauses, then says, "You mean we may be undercounting the casualties?"

Grissom says, “I think we are. That school-bus shooting in Compton earlier this month, the one where the bus was caught in the cross fire between two rival gangs? The LAPD’s counterterrorism division now believes that wasn’t what happened. They think it was a coordinated attack, that there were no local gangs involved.”

The president closes his eyes. “Children in a school bus stopped at a red light. Automatic gunfire swept back and forth...at least ten dead, am I right?”

Grissom says, “Two more later died. Official death toll from that attack now stands at twelve, sir.”

There is silence in the Oval Office. President Kent opens his eyes, clenches his right hand into a fist. “General, what the hell is going on? Who are these people?”

Grissom speaks without notes or a PowerPoint presentation, nothing that can be subpoenaed or leaked. “Sir, the random terrorist attacks aren’t random. It’s taken a lot of interagency work, but Army Intelligence and other agencies believe there’s one common thread connecting these terrorists. They’re all working to disrupt our economy and our sense of security. That’s why we’ve received no demands. They’re looking for disruption. That’s all.”

“Who’s behind the attacks?” the president asks. “Foreign terrorists or domestic?”

Grissom shakes his head. “Looks like both, sir. You’ve heard the saying ‘The enemy of my enemy is my friend’?”

“Of course.”

“That’s the situation we’re facing. Disparate nations around the world who are our sworn enemies—like China and Russia—are finding it convenient to support and fund these terror groups. We don’t have solid evidence because each attack comes from a separate cell that communicates with its paymasters via encrypted e-mail using the farthest corners of the dark web.”

“What can we do about it?”

Grissom stands up and points to the French doors leading out of the Oval Office. “Sir, we need to talk outside.”

Two

GENERAL GRISSOM LETS the president lead the way.

A female Secret Service agent wearing a black pantsuit with a white blouse opens the French doors; she's backed up by another agent wearing tactical gear and holding an automatic weapon. On the Oval Office patio, a closed-off area terraced with small trees and bushes, the president takes one wrought-iron chair and Grissom takes the other.

"This is what we've learned," Grissom says, leaning forward, hands clasped in front of him. A weathered pink scar runs across the top of his right hand, courtesy of militants in Somalia. "It's like a swarm of wasps flying in random directions, seeking out targets, attacking, disappearing, then attacking again. Car bombs, one attempt at a dirty bomb, poisonings, shootings, attacks at malls and shopping centers. At first it was the randomness that confused law enforcement and intelligence agencies. What was the point? And the terrorists who were captured, they were a mix: Teenage boys. Honorably discharged veterans. Even a few goddamn grandmothers. Angry wasps out there, each attacking for a separate reason. They're anti-government or anti-liberal or anti-conservative. No real thread connecting them."

The president says, "So where's the wasps' nest? The source?"

"Good question, sir, and we've narrowed it down. We have located a few lines of financing and other support from Iran, China, Russia, and some Mexican cartels. Nothing that would stand up in a court of law. But this support is deep and widespread. The previous attacks, they were practice. Domestic terrorist cells are planning assaults, and, sir, they're coming here. To the District."

The president sags in his chair. "When?"

“Possibly within a week. The chatter—some open communications and some partially deciphered e-mails—is pointing to the attack coming soon.”

“Any chance it’s just random chatter? False flags?”

Grissom shakes his head. “With two or three threats, that’s possible. But no, these threats are too deep, too specific. There is a lot of anger and bitterness out there among Americans, sir, and someone is expertly tapping into that resentment, firing people up and pointing them at us. During the January sixth riots, most of the protesters were initially peaceful, crazed though they might have been. It took only a small number of hard men goading the demonstrators to turn that crowd into a violent mob that threatened our institutions.”

Grissom looks the president in the eye. “The American people are normally a peaceful lot. But in these troubled times...they can be molded, shaped, encouraged to commit violence. That’s what we’re up against, sir.”

The president says, “What do we do, then?”

“Sir, I’d like to have a principals’ meeting as soon as possible. Perhaps this evening, with you in attendance, and representatives from the NSA, the FBI, the CIA, Homeland Security, and the DC Metro Police. A task force to take the lead and try to prevent future attacks.”

“And you?”

“I’d be there, of course.”

The president smiles. “This task force will need a leader.”

“The head of the FBI or Homeland Security should take that role, sir. I’d be on hand with the military to supply any resources they need.”

The president shakes his head. “I’m thinking of someone else, General. Someone I can rely on and who won’t bullshit me.”

“The secretary of defense?”

The president says, “You.”

Grissom is startled into silence. He hasn’t been this surprised since that hot morning in Mogadishu when a brother-and-sister team who sold sweet