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JASON ELAM
AND STEVE YOHN

NOVEL



P R E S E N T E D B Y

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P U B L I S H E R S , I N C .***

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Blackout

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JASON ELAM

It is to the real Jesus that I dedicate this book.

STEVE YOHN

To Madeline, my girl.

DEDICATION

THANK YOU, GOD, for love, patience, and creativity. Use this for Your glory.

When we're writing, we're thinking of our families; when we're with our families, we're thinking about writing. Thanks to Tamy and Nancy and all the kids for putting up with us.

We are deeply indebted to the whole Tyndale family—Karen Watson for making this all happen, Todd Starowitz for getting the word out, Dean Renninger and the design team for producing consistently amazing artwork, and Jeremy Taylor for putting the dress on the pig.

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TUESDAY, JUNE 30

The impact was swift and sudden. Muhammed Zerín Khan cursed himself; he should have seen it coming. He had always prided himself on having a sixth sense—a special awareness of his surroundings. But this time, his gift had failed him, and now he would pay for it.

The initial concussion knocked the air from his lungs and left him stunned. A dizzying pain forced him to squeeze his eyes shut until the wave passed.

As he sucked for air, he spun and scrambled to all fours. He knew he had to get into fighting position or it was all over. But as he looked around, he knew he was done for. *Where did they all come from?*

Hands were all over him. Something sharp pressed into his lower back. He tried to squirm away, but the grips on his arms and legs were like iron manacles.

Less than a week ago, Zerín had walked into the Georgia State Prison and sat down in the tight cubicle. His father was waiting for him on the other side of the Plexiglas with the phone already in his hand. Zerín pressed his knuckles to the cool glass

as he picked up the phone. His father leaned forward and completed the fist tap. "It's been a while, Son. You good?"

"I'm living. You?"

His father slowly leaned back in his chair, stretching the phone's cord taut. Zerin noticed how the man's age had begun to reveal itself. The wrinkles around his eyes and the gray streaked through his beard made him look much older than Zerin remembered. The look was a little surreal, a little discordant with what he knew of his father's past, because with the white *kufi* and the white prison-issue garb, his father actually looked like one of the wise imams Zerin had seen online.

"Me? I'm doing well. Allah has blessed me. Besides, it does my heart good to know what's on the horizon," his father stated with a definitive smirk.

"What's on the horizon'? What do you mean?" Zerin asked him, puzzled.

The older man slowly shook his head. "I'd love to tell you, Son. I want you to know—to be ready for—what's coming down the pike. But I can only say so much. Let's just say it's gonna happen. It is gonna happen. And you'll know it when it does. And you'll also know that your old man knew about it before it did, because they came to *me* for help. They asked *me* to organize this. *I* am the only one in this whole facility to whom they have entrusted their plan.

"So when it all goes down, you'll know that your broken-down old pops was responsible for everything that takes place in this here facility. You'll know that I was involved in the biggest thing that's happened since . . . well, just trust me, boy, you'll know. Meantime, we just have to be patient, and *insha'Allah*, we will make it count when the time is right."

Zerin said nothing. His father had taken these cryptic turns occasionally during recent visits. The first few rebuffs had taught Zerin not to try to dig for anything deeper than what his dad was ready to willingly offer up.

After a short pause, his father sat upright in his chair, releasing the tension from the phone cord. "Enough of that for now. I want to know how my son is. How's your training going? Tell me everything."

It was now less than one week later, and Zerin was glad he hadn't

had *this* story to tell his father. The weight on his back was pressing the air out of his lungs. He fought and squirmed with every fiber of his existence, but there were simply too many of them. There was laughter all around, mocking and cruel, as those in the room started a mini celebration.

Zerin's rage boiled over, and he made a sudden effort to free himself. One arm got loose but was quickly clamped back down. Someone had his head pressed firmly into the short carpet and was rubbing it roughly back and forth, taking the skin off his right cheek directly under his eye.

Suddenly he was flipped onto his side, and he heard the unmistakable sound of someone ripping off pieces of duct tape. Through the bodies, Zerin could see the one with the tape moving toward him. He tried to tuck his legs a bit in order to drive his heels into this man. Maybe he could break his assailant's nose and in the frenzy free himself. It was a long shot, but at the very least Zerin could make them realize he wasn't simply going to let them have their way.

As the others made room for the taper, Zerin saw his chance. He lunged with all his might, kicking straight into what he hoped was the man's face. At the last second, the attacker saw it coming and dropped his head just enough to take the full force on his forehead. While the man stumbled backward, dazed, the pile on top of Zerin grew even larger. Fists were driven into his side, and threats were made against any further resistance.

Zerin had no hope now. His opponents held him firmly, and the tape began wrapping his legs. Once his ankles were secured, his wrists and arms were next. As his arms were pulled tighter behind his back, Zerin felt a piercing pain in his shoulder. He refused to cry out.

Duct tape went around and around his head and eyes, and then a strip went over his mouth, causing his first moment of real panic. He had been breathing deeply through his mouth, but now he had to draw rapidly through his nose.

Now he saw nothing but felt clothes being ripped off him. A chill told him when there was nothing left on his body.

Then he was on the move. The complete darkness was disorienting. He tried to picture in his mind the direction he was being taken but soon got lost. The carpet he was being dragged across was

creating more rug burns on his already-reddened body. Zerin was trapped between rage and terror.

After a few more yards, he felt himself lifted off the ground and passed from hand to hand. There was laughing and shouting coming from all around him.

Then, as quickly as he was picked up, he fell back down. His body slammed headfirst into the floor—only now the abrasive carpet had been replaced by hard tile. A searing pain shot through Zerin’s brain, and he immediately felt blood rolling across what little skin on his face wasn’t covered with tape.

As he tried to collect his wits, hot breath made its way into his ear. “Khan, did you really think you could hide from us? Did you really think we wouldn’t get you? We get everybody!”

The duct tape was ripped from his mouth. “You have any last words, Khan?”

Zerin spit, not knowing if he hit anybody. Another big cheer went through the crowd, as well as one loud curse.

Again he felt himself being lifted, and then there came another free fall. Zerin cringed and tried to brace himself. However, the impact was not what he expected. It felt like he had been dropped into liquid fire. The shock sucked all the air from his already-burning lungs.

Then he realized that it wasn’t heat but cold—ice cold. He instinctively took a breath, and freezing water rushed through his sinuses. He began to choke. As quickly as he was in the water he was plucked out.

Amid the laughter and cheers, he was flopped on the cold tile, gagging and trying to rid the water from his lungs.

Suddenly the unmistakable voice of Roy Burton, head coach of the Colorado Mustangs, pierced the air. “What do you idiots think you’re doing? Get away from him, now! Somebody get some scissors and cut this boy loose.”

Zerin heard the mass exodus of people, and by the time the tape was removed from his eyes, the crowd had grown very small.

It was then that Coach Burton noticed the blood. “Get the trainers in here too. Quick!”

Burton leaned down. “Son, you okay? I’m sorry about this.”

But Zerín said nothing. What was there to say? He had been hurt and humiliated. They had attacked his body and his dignity. Those were not things he could just brush off and forget. Zerín had heard about rookie hazing in the Professional Football League, but this incident had gone way too far.

Now the seeds of revenge had been sown. On that cold floor, he made a vow—a promise to himself that he would be patient. He would find his time. He would strike! Just as his father had said.

“It is gonna happen. . . . We just have to be patient, and insha’Allah, we will make it count when the time is right.”



JASON ELAM is a seventeen-year NFL veteran placekicker for the Atlanta Falcons.

He was born in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, and grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1988, Jason received a full football scholarship to the University of Hawaii, where he played for four years, earning academic All-America and Kodak All-America honors. He graduated in 1992 with a bachelor's degree in communications and was drafted in the third round of the 1993 NFL draft by the Denver Broncos, where he played for 15 years.

In 1997 and 1998, Jason won back-to-back world championships with the Broncos and was selected to the Pro Bowl in 1995, 1998, and 2001. He is currently working on a master's degree in global apologetics at Liberty Theological Seminary and has an abiding interest in Middle East affairs, the study of Scripture, and defending the Christian faith. Jason is a licensed commercial airplane pilot, and he and his wife, Tamy, have four children.



STEVE YOHN grew up as a pastor's kid in Fresno, California, and both of those facts contributed significantly to his slightly warped perspective on life. Steve graduated from Multnomah Bible College with a bachelor's degree in biblical studies and barely survived a stint as a youth pastor.

While studying at Denver Seminary, Steve worked as a videographer for Youth for Christ International, traveling throughout the world to capture the ministry's global impact. With more than two decades of ministry experience, both inside and outside the church, Steve has discovered his greatest satisfactions lie in writing, speaking, and one-on-one mentoring.

Surprisingly, although his hobbies are reading classic literature, translating the New Testament from the Greek, and maintaining a list of political leaders of every country of the world over the last twenty-five years, he still occasionally gets invited to parties and has a few friends. His wife, Nancy, and their daughter are the joys of his life.