



FATAL
STRIKE

“DIANN MILLS NEVER DISAPPOINTS.” —LYNETTE EASON

DIANN
MILLS

PRAISE FOR DIANN MILLS

BURDEN OF PROOF

“DiAnn Mills never disappoints. From characters to fall in love with to those who need to be behind bars, this story is one that will tug on every emotion and wring you dry—while making you love every minute. Put on a fresh pot of coffee before you start this one because you’re not going to want to sleep until the suspense ride is over. You might want to grab a safety harness while you’re at it—you’re going to need it!”

LYNETTE EASON, bestselling, award-winning author of the Elite Guardians and Blue Justice series

“In *Burden of Proof*, DiAnn Mills pairs a traumatized FBI agent with a desperate father to create a suspense-packed story that will keep readers captivated until the very last page.”

NANCY MEHL, author of the Defenders of Justice series

“DiAnn Mills has raised the bar for romantic suspense yet again. *Burden of Proof* will hover in your mind until you finish it and are sad there is no more. Good thing she continues to write such powerful novels.”

LAURINE SNELLING, author of the Under Northern Lights series

HIGH TREASON

“In this third book in Mills’s action-packed FBI Task Force series, the stakes are higher than ever. Compelling characters and a riveting plot that fits seamlessly with current events make this novel impossible to put down. Readers can count on being glued to the pages late into the night—as ‘just one more chapter’ turns into ‘can’t stop now.’”

ROMANTIC TIMES

“Mills has brought cultural and spiritual differences to life. Her characters, along with their real-life struggles, will bring an instant connection to readers. Her expertise in story development guarantees *High Treason* will end up as a favorite.”

CHRISTIAN MARKET MAGAZINE

“This suspenseful novel will appeal to Christian readers looking for a tidy, uplifting tale.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“The action-packed, romantic suspense includes the FBI, the CIA, a Saudi prince, and foreign intrigue wrapped in a mystery that keeps readers guessing until the last page is turned. . . . Fans of clean read suspense, without explicit sexual content and bad language, will enjoy the romantic chemistry, the suspense, and the conclusion.”

MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

DEEP EXTRACTION

“A harrowing police procedural [that] . . . Mills’s many fans will devour.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL

“Few characters in Mills’s latest novel are who they appear to be at first glance. . . . Combined with intense action and stunning twists, this search for the truth keeps readers on the edges of their favorite reading chairs. . . . The crime is tightly plotted, and the message of faith is authentic and sincere.”

ROMANTIC TIMES, 4½-star review, Top Pick

DEADLY ENCOUNTER

“Crackling dialogue and heart-stopping plotlines are the hallmarks of Mills’s thrillers, and this series launch won’t disappoint her many fans. Dealing with issues of murder, domestic terrorism, and airport security, it eerily echoes current events.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL

“[Mills] has the ability to sweep you off your feet and into the middle of an adventure in a matter of paragraphs. . . . If you are looking for a little bit of action, romance, intrigue, and domestic terrorism (and a happily ever after!), then this is the book for you.”

Radiant Lit

“Fans of clean romantic suspense will enjoy this well-plotted winner.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“From the first paragraph until the last, this story is a nail-biter, promising to delight readers who enjoy a well-written adventure.”

CHRISTIAN MARKET MAGAZINE

“Steady pacing and solid characterization make this latest from DiAnn Mills a sure favorite among FBI procedural fans. . . . The well-crafted case takes several twists and turns along the way and keeps the pace and tension high.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

DEADLOCK

“DiAnn Mills brings us another magnificent, inspirational thriller in her FBI: Houston series. *Deadlock* is a riveting, fast-paced adventure that will hold you captive from the opening pages to the closing epilogue.”

FRESH FICTION

“Mills’s newest installment in the FBI: Houston series will keep readers on the edge of their seats. For those who love a good ‘who-done-it,’ *Deadlock* delivers.”

CBA RETAILERS + RESOURCES

“Mills does a superb job building the relationship between the two polar opposite detectives. With some faith overtones, *Deadlock* is an excellent police drama that even mainstream readers would enjoy.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

DOUBLE CROSS

“DiAnn Mills always gives us a good thriller, filled with inspirational thoughts, and *Double Cross* is another great one!”

FRESH FICTION

“Tension explodes at every corner within these pages. . . . Mills’s writing is transparently crisp, backed up with solid research, filled with believable characters and sparks of romantic chemistry.”

NOVELCROSSING.COM

“For the romantic suspense fan, there is plenty of action and twists present. For the inspirational reader, the faith elements fit nicely into the context of the story. . . . The romance is tenderly beautiful, and the ending bittersweet.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

FIREWALL

“Mills takes readers on an explosive ride. . . . A story as romantic as it is exciting, *Firewall* will appeal to fans of Dee Henderson’s romantic suspense stories.”

BOOKLIST

“With an intricate plot involving domestic terrorism that could have been ripped from the headlines, Mills’s romantic thriller makes for compelling reading.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL

“A fast-moving, intricately plotted thriller.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“Mills once again demonstrates her spectacular writing skills in her latest action-packed work. . . . The story moves at a fast pace that will keep readers riveted until the climactic end.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

FATAL STRIKE



FATAL
STRIKE

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DIANN
MILLS

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Fatal Strike

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Fatal Strike is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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SPECIAL AGENT LEAH RIESEL scanned the headlines on her phone. A prosecutor from Galveston had been found murdered behind a construction site, the second apparent victim of gang violence in two days. Both deaths were caused by rattlesnake venom injections to the heart. Before she could pull up additional reports on the woman's untimely death, Leah's phone rang.

"Riesel, hostage situation in Galveston," the SWAT commander said. "Grab your gear. The chopper takes off in five."

"On it." She took a last lingering look at the half-eaten blueberry donut and coffee on her cubicle's desk.

Could this have anything to do with the two murders in Galveston?

Before most of the city began the workday, Leah boarded a

Little Bird helicopter beneath whirling blades and the pressure of a critical operation. Dressed in full camo and shouldering her sniper gear, she inhaled the rising temps. Feverish Houston. With the familiar air transport sounds ushering in memories of past missions, her adrenaline kicked in.

A pilot from the tactical helicopter unit lifted the chopper into the air for the twenty-minute ride to Galveston. She recognized him from previous assignments involving aircraft used to deliver SWAT and the elite hostage rescue teams to crisis incidents. This morning her focus eliminated any chitchat.

Leah grabbed sound-canceling headphones and contacted the SWAT commander already on the ground. "Riesel here. Special Agent in Charge Thomas briefed me on a home invasion that's turned violent."

The SAC would be watching the operation at the Crisis Management Operations Center.

"Negotiations have gotten us nowhere." The SWAT commander's voice rose above the chopper's blade-snap. "Two unidentified men are holding two women and three children at gunpoint. Galveston PD estimates they've been inside the home for at least an hour. Demanding we leave the area after giving them five hundred grand and a gassed-up speedboat. Clock is ticking with forty minutes max. We've backed off as far as they know."

Leah swiped through pics taken with telephoto lenses and sent to her phone. Each ski-masked man held a child as a shield. Leah detested the savagery and the horrific emotions the hostages must be feeling.

"We're located on San Luis Pass Road on the western section of the island. Nearest house is five hundred yards away. Owners are in Europe. We're in contact with the agency managing it."

She didn't need a key to access the home.

The SWAT commander continued. "One of the hostages is the owner of the home, Amanda Barton."

"Is there a Mr. Barton in the picture?"

"Divorced. Lives in California."

Unlikely the ex-husband was behind this.

"Agent Jon Colbert will be on scene shortly," the commander said. "He had a deposition early this morning in Texas City and drove on to Galveston. Over the weekend, his SWAT partner had emergency knee surgery. Out for six weeks."

And Leah's partner had left the city yesterday on vacation. The luck of the draw meant she and Jon would be working together. "I'll contact you as soon as we land."

Jon Colbert, a sniper who had excellent marksmanship and a stellar reputation, also worked organized crime. But she and Jon had never worked together. The idea of teaming up with an agent she barely knew made her uneasy. If a sniper mission required a partner, she preferred an established relationship where she would know how the person processed information.

Shoving aside her doubts, she narrowed her thoughts on what lay ahead. The precarious situation and local law enforcement's inability to negotiate added up to why she and Jon had been assigned to the case.

She grasped her backpack, lighter than usual with only a spotting scope, ammo, water, communication equipment, extra batteries, granola bar, and a handheld radio. Her Glock, as comfortable in her right hand as a toothbrush, found its spot in her back waistband. She touched her H-S Precision heavy tactical rifle.

The sooner she got to Galveston, the sooner she could provide intelligence and help neutralize the circumstances. Her

priority was seeing the women and children freed from these ruthless men.



Jon received a text from Special Agent in Charge Thomas that Leah Riesel had left the Houston FBI office and was en route to Galveston. He'd met her a few times, and they'd qualified together. Attractive woman—dark-brown hair, light-olive skin, New Yorker with the accent to prove it. Her professionalism in the violent crime division wavered between exceptional and extraordinary. A touch of toughness. Jon had heard not to make her mad—she had earned the nickname Panther for a reason. He remembered her stats—number three in the US for distance shots. Good thing he wasn't easily intimidated.

Once the chopper landed, Leah would be transported in an unmarked car to a vacant house more than a quarter of a mile away from the Barton home. No point in making the two men more trigger-happy when they'd warned law enforcement to back off.

The SWAT commander spoke through Jon's radio attached to his collar. "Thermal imaging confirms four adults and three children inside the Barton home. The men claim they'll kill the children first. We have fifteen minutes."

In Galveston, Jon stopped at Broadway and Sixty-First Street. Tourists persisted in the middle of the thoroughfare, pushing strollers, riding surrey bikes, and enjoying the day. Some were dressed for the beach and others clutched what they needed for their excursion. All hindered his turn. Obstacles in his mission. If they knew the situation not far from them, they'd grab their loved ones and speed home. Each moment delayed

his shot and shoved the hostages closer to death. A chilling composure took over his emotional, mental, and physical reactions.

The busy street finally cleared. Jon turned west onto Seawall Boulevard and drove on to San Luis Pass Road. The hostage site was four and a half miles beyond there.

Were the two men inside the Barton home wannabes looking to make a name for themselves? Strung out on drugs? Was this a personal vendetta? No matter how this ended—either a surrender or he'd be instructed to take a shot—their moment in history would likely be the lead story on tonight's news.

His phone alerted him to an incoming call. He responded before the first ring ended. "Colbert." The chopper's rhythmic whir reverberated through his phone.

"Riesel here. Landing in five at Galveston Island State Park. SWAT commander has given me a location on the west side of the Barton home."

"I'll be on foot by then. Taking a position on the east, beach side."

"I'll need seven minutes to get into place," she said.

"Okay." No need to remind her of the ticking clock.

He touched End and whipped his truck onto a beach-access road where police officers had instructed residents to shelter in place. He switched off the engine. Grabbing his gear, he bolted down the beach. A Galveston police officer stopped him, and Jon handed him his ID. Seconds later, he moved toward his site. A sultry breeze blew across the water, and he recalculated his shot.

Crouching low, he moved past police SWAT standing guard. FBI SWAT held the position Riesel was headed for. They were racing against time, a commodity that stopped for nothing or no one. At any moment, one of the armed men could pull the trigger on those inside the Barton home.

FATAL STRIKE

Restraint.

Control.

Tense muscles relaxed.

His heartbeat slowed.

A clear head laid out the steps before the kill shot.

No mistakes.

Precision.

Accuracy.

A chance for the women and children to live another day.

Near a sand dune, he tuned out the occasional seagull and the waves rushing against the shore. After wiping the sweat from his hands on his pants, Jon set up his rifle and scope, activated his radio, and spoke to the SWAT commander and Leah Riesel.