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**Robert Ludlum's**  
**The Bourne**  
**Objective**

Written by Eric Van Lustbader

Published by Orion

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Robert Ludlum's™

# THE BOURNE OBJECTIVE

A New **Jason Bourne** Novel by  
Eric Van Lustbader



An Orion paperback

First published in Great Britain in 2010  
by Orion

This paperback edition published in 2011  
by Orion Books Ltd,  
Orion House, 5 Upper St Martin's Lane,  
London WC2H 9EA

An Hachette UK company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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A CIP catalogue record for this book  
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-4091-1783-4

Printed and bound in Great Britain  
by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers  
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made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging  
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## BANGALORE, INDIA

Night descended like a curtain of scuttling insects, coming alive with the setting of the sun. The noise was atrocious, as was the stench of unwashed bodies, human excrement, rotting food, and decomposing bodies. The garbage of Bangalore shifted back and forth like a sludgy tide.

Leonid Danilovich Arkadin sat in a darkened room that smelled of hot electronics, stale smoke, and cooling dosas. Firing up a cigarette with his chrome lighter, he stared down at the ribbed skeleton of Phase Three, part of the ever-expanding Electronic City rising out of the slums clinging to Bangalore like a disease. Electronic City, built in the 1990s, was now the world capital of technology outsourcing; virtually every major high-tech company had IT offices here, making it the hub of the technical support industry spawned by technologies that morphed every six months.

*Gold from concrete*, Arkadin thought, dazzled. He'd read up on the history of alchemy, because of its transformative nature it had become a special interest of his. At this early hour of the evening – early, that is, for the outsourcing crowd whose offices by and large filled the buildings to capacity – the lobby and corridors were as

quiet and still as they would be if they were in New York City at 3 AM. The outsourcing crowd was geared to the workday in the United States, which made them as virtual as ghosts when they were at their consoles, cordless earphones wrapped around their heads.

After the fiasco in Iran, when he had royally screwed Maslov, he had set up operations here, away from those he wished eventually to hunt, who were already hunting him: Dimitri Ilyinovich Maslov and Jason Bourne.

From his suite of offices he had a perfect view of the block-square work site, a pit excavated out of the earth where the footings for the foundations of another office tower were being laid. Usually the site was lit by glaring floodlights, so the crews could work through the night, but work had stopped unexpectedly two weeks ago and hadn't yet resumed. As a result the excavation had been invaded by the city's ragtag army of beggars, whores, and gangs of young kids trying to fleece everyone who passed by.

Now and again, as he let the smoke drift from his nostrils, he could hear the stealthy cat-like padding of his men strategically placed throughout the suite, but he was alone in this room with Hassan, a large, square software magician who smelled faintly of circuits and cumin. Arkadin had brought his men with him, loyal Muslims all, which presented a problem only insofar as the native Hindus hated Muslims. He'd looked into using a detail of Sikh mercenaries, but he couldn't find it in himself to trust them.

Hassan had proven invaluable. He had been the computer programmer for Nikolai Yevsen, the late and

unlamented arms dealer whose business Arkadin had appropriated out from under Maslov. Hassan had made a copy of all the customer, supplier, and contact data on Yevsen's mainframe before wiping it clean. Now Arkadin was working Yevsen's list, raking in unimaginable mountains of money by supplying war matériel for virtually every local warlord, despot, and terrorist organization around the globe.

Hassan sat hunched over his computer, using encrypted software slaved to the remote servers Arkadin had set up in a secure location. He was a man who lived to work. In the weeks since Hassan's defection and Yevsen's death in Khartoum, Arkadin had never once seen him leave these offices. He slept after eating a light lunch, from one to three thirty precisely, then it was back to the computer.

Arkadin's attention was only partially on Hassan. On a sideboard nearby lay a laptop, with hot-swappable drive bays, into which he'd slid the hard drive from the laptop one of his men had stolen from Gustavo Moreno just before the Colombian drug lord was shot to death in his Mexico City compound. Turning to it, Arkadin felt his face bathed in the eerie blue electronic glow, hard as marble, hard as his father's callused fist.

Stubbing out his cigarette, he scrolled through the files, which he'd already pored through again and again; he had a number of computer hacks on his payroll, but he hadn't allowed any of them – even Hassan – to comb through this particular hard drive. He went back to the ghost file that had reluctantly shown its enigmatic face only under the duress of a powerful anti-virus program.

He could see it now, but it was still locked away, encrypted with a logarithm his cryptographic software still hadn't been able to crack despite running for more than twenty-four hours.

Moreno's laptop, which was hidden in a safe place, was as mysterious as this ghost file. It had a slot in the side that lacked the receptor for a USB plug-in and was too big to accommodate an SD card, too small to be a fingerprint reader. Clearly, it was a custom retrofit, but for what?

What the hell was in that file, anyway? he wondered. And where would a drug lord get an unbreakable logarithm like this one – not at your local hacker's mart in Cali or Mexico City, that was for sure.

Lost in thought as he was, Arkadin's head nevertheless came up as if he scented the sound, rather than heard it. His ears practically twitched like a hunting dog's, and then, moving back into the shadows, he said, 'Hassan, what's that light moving down in the construction site?'

Hassan glanced up. 'Which one, sir? There are so many fires ...'

'There.' Arkadin pointed. 'No, farther down, stand up and you'll see it clearly.'

The moment Hassan rose, leaning forward, a spray of semi-automatic fire demolished the office windows, spraying Hassan, the desk, and the surrounding carpet with an ice storm of glass crystals. Hassan, slammed backward, lay on the carpet, gasping and drooling blood.

Arkadin ejected the hard drive just before a second hail of bullets flew through the shattered windows, gouging the wall opposite. Taking shelter within the

desk's leg hole, he took up a Škorpion vz. 61 submachine gun and shot to ribbons the computer Hassan was working on. By this time staccato semi-automatic gunfire had begun to erupt from within the office suite itself. The overlapping noises resounded, peppered with shouted commands and the screams of the dying. No help from his men, that much was clear enough. But he did recognize the language in which the laconic orders were being delivered: Russian. And more specific than that, Moscow Russian.

Arkadin thought Hassan was speaking or at least making sounds, but whatever he was saying was lost within the explosions of gunfire. Since the attackers were Russian, Arkadin had no doubt they were after Yevsen's priceless information. He was now trapped inside a pincer assault both from within the suite and from the grounds outside the blown-out windows. He had only moments in which to act. Rising, he scuttled over to where Hassan lay, his hot, bloodshot eyes staring up at him.

'Help . . . help me.' Hassan's voice was thick with blood and terror.

'Of course, my friend,' Arkadin said kindly, 'of course.'

With luck, his enemies would have mistaken Hassan for him, which would buy him the precious time to escape. But not if Hassan began to scream. Jamming the hard drive deep into his pocket, he pressed his shoe onto Hassan's throat until Hassan arched back and his eyes nearly bugged out of his head. But with his windpipe crushed, he could make no sound. Behind him, Arkadin heard a confused swirl of sounds on the other side of



the door. His men would defend him to the death, he knew, but in this case they seemed to have been caught off guard and might even be outnumbered. He had only seconds to act.

As in all modern office buildings, the large windows were sealed shut, possibly as a safeguard against suicide attempts, which now and then occurred in any event. Arkadin cranked open a side window and slipped out into the unquiet night. Six floors below him was the excavation pit from which the cavernous new building would rise. Enormous earthmoving machines reared up amid the makeshift cardboard hovels and cook fires like long-necked dragons slumbering in the semi-darkness.

The sleek, post-modern building had no horizontal sills outside the window, but between the windows were lengths of decorative outcroppings of concrete and steel running vertically. Arkadin swung onto one just as a fistful of bullets pinged through the door to his office – his men had lost their valiant battle with the intruders.

The smells of the Bangalore night, of ghee, frying dosas, betel juice, and human waste, rose up from the excavation pit six floors below like a noxious mist as he began to shinny down the concrete-and-steel column. At that moment he became aware of crisscrossing beams of light below him: Having determined that they hadn't shot him to death up in his office, they were beginning the search for him in earnest on the ground. Acutely conscious of how exposed and vulnerable he was clinging like a spider to the side of the building, he stopped at the fourth-floor level. The panes were smaller and more evenly spaced here because this floor was given over to

the air-conditioning system, the water and electrical systems, and the like. He kicked at the windowpane on the floor below using the toe of his boot, but to no avail, the glass was impervious to the blows. Lowering himself farther, he swung his foot into a metal plate below the window. It dented, a corner twisted up but would not come off, so he scuttled down until, in this precarious position, he was able to insert his fingers into the space between the metal and the wall. Applying pressure, he levered the plate off. Now he was confronted with an oblong hole that appeared to be just large enough for his body. Grabbing onto the pillar with both hands, he swung his feet into the gap, pushed, inserting his legs, then his buttocks. Only then did he let go of the pillar.

For a moment his head and torso dangled in space, long enough for him to see, even upside down, the searchlights rising toward him, creeping up the facade of the building. An instant later he was dazzled, caught in their light. He heard raised voices, guttural shouts in Russian before he gathered himself and pushed himself fully into the gap. Followed closely by the explosive sounds of gunfire, he tunneled into utter darkness.

He lay still, regaining his breath and equilibrium. Then, using his feet and knees, he urged himself through the space, wriggling first one shoulder, then the other. This method served him well for three or four feet, until he came up against what seemed to be a barrier. Craning his neck, he could just make out a faint patch of gray floating somewhere in the blackness ahead of him, which meant he hadn't come up against a barrier at all – the space had narrowed unexpectedly. He pushed

with his legs, but this only seemed to wedge his shoulders in more securely, so he stopped and did nothing at all, willing his body to relax while his mind ran through strategies to extricate himself.

He began a series of deep-breathing exercises, slowing with each exhale. He willed himself to think of his body as boneless, as infinitely malleable, until his mind was utterly convinced. Then he contracted his shoulders, bringing them in toward his chest as he'd once seen a contortionist do in the Moscow circus. Slowly, ever so gently, he pushed with the outer edges of his boot soles. At first nothing happened; then, contracting farther, he began to inch forward, coming through the narrow section and out the other side. Soon enough after that the top of his head butted against the inner grille. Drawing his legs up as far as the confined space allowed, he imagined them going through the grille. Then all at once he slammed his legs straight, battering the grille with such force it popped off, and he tumbled into what appeared to be a closet, stinking of hot metal and grease.

Closer inspection revealed that the cubicle was an electrical switch station for the elevator. Coming out the other side, he found himself in the elevator shaft. He could hear the shouts of the Russian assassins. The elevator car was moving downward toward the fourth floor; the men outside must have informed those inside of where he had reentered the building.

He looked around and saw a vertical ladder bolted to the wall directly across from where he stood. But before he could make a move the hatch on the roof of the elevator car swung up and one of the Russians poked

his head and torso out. Seeing Arkadin, he brought up a submachine gun.

Arkadin ducked as a burst of gunfire sparked off the wall at the spot his head had just been. In a crouch, he aimed from the hip and sent a hail of bullets into the Russian's face. The top of the car was almost level with him, and he vaulted upward, landing on it. The moment his boot touched the roof, a burst of bullets exploded upward through the open hatch almost knocking him off his feet, but he kept going. Taking another long stride to the far edge of the roof, he leapt across the gap to the vertical ladder, down which he immediately scrambled. Behind him, the elevator car began to descend. When it was a good six feet below him it stopped.

He braced himself, swung his upper torso around, and the moment he saw movement out of the open hatch, sent three quick bursts pinging against the roof. Then he continued down the ladder, dropping two and three rungs at a time in order to make himself a more difficult target to track.

Answering fire started up, sparking against the metal rungs as he spidered his way down. Then abruptly the firing stopped, and risking a glance upward, he saw at once that one of the surviving Russians had crawled out of the open hatch and swung down onto the vertical ladder, coming after him.

Arkadin paused long enough to raise his weapon, but before he could fire the Russian let go of his hold and, plummeting down, grabbed onto him, almost ripping his arms out of their sockets. He swung wildly with the added weight and the momentum from the falling body,

and in that moment the Russian swatted the weapon out of his hand. It went banging down the shaft, clanging and caroming this way and that. At the same time, the elevator resumed its descent.

The Russian had one hand pressed against Arkadin's throat, while the other ripped a K-Bar knife out of its sheath. The Russian pushed Arkadin's chin up, exposing his throat. The thick, wicked blade arced through the air and Arkadin drove one knee upward. The Russian's body bent like a bow, intersecting with the bottom of the elevator as it came down.

Even braced as he was, Arkadin was almost dragged into the side of the elevator as the Russian's body was ripped from him. For a moment he dangled upside down, and only his ankles hooked through a rung of the ladder saved him. He let himself swing while he oriented himself, then he reached out, his powerful hands gripping the ladder as he unhooked his ankles and swung down until he was right-side up again. The strain on his shoulders was enormous, but this time he was prepared and did not falter. His feet found a rung below him and he resumed his downward climb.

Below him the elevator continued its descent to the ground floor, but no one poked their head out of the open hatch. Landing on the roof, he peered cautiously inside. He counted two bodies; neither one was left alive. He dropped down, stripped one of the corpses of its weapon, then hit the **BASEMENT** button.

The basement of the tower was a vast, fluorescent-lighted parking garage. It was not, however, well used,

since most people who worked in the building couldn't afford cars. Instead they called taxi services to take them to and from work.

Apart from his own BMW, two gleaming Mercedeses, a Toyota Qualis, and a Honda City, the garage was bereft of vehicles. Arkadin checked them; all were empty. Avoiding his car, he broke into the Toyota and after several moments of fiddling with the electronics managed to defeat the starter cutoff switch. Settling himself behind the wheel, he put the car in gear, drove across the bare concrete and onto the up-ramp to the street.

With a spray of sparks from the undercarriage Arkadin bounced out at the rear of the building onto the roughly paved street. Directly ahead of him lay the construction pit. So many fires flared among the rubble and the gigantic machines, the entire site seemed in danger of bursting into flame.

To either side of him he heard the throaty roar of powerful motorcycle engines as two Russians rode their mechanical beasts toward him in a pincer movement. It seemed clear that they had been waiting for him at either end of the street so that no matter which way he turned, left or right, they could head him off. Pressing the accelerator to the floor, he drove straight ahead, crossing the street, and crashed through the flimsy fence that encircled the building site.

Immediately the Toyota's nose dipped down as the car descended almost precipitously into the pit. The shocks took most of the force of its landing, but Arkadin still bounced in his seat as the car hit bottom and, tires

squealing, leveled out. Behind him the two motorcycles lifted into the air as they followed him into the pit – landing, bouncing – and took off after him.

He headed directly toward one of the fires, scattering vagrants as he went. Passing through the flames, he veered hard to his left, threading the proverbial needle between two huge machines and – just managing to avoid one of the slicks of greasy garbage – turned hard right toward another fire and another group of lost souls.

Glancing in his side mirror, he saw one of the motorcycles still on his tail. Had he lost the other one? Approaching the flames, he waited until the last minute, when the glare was at its height, then jammed on the brakes. As people ran in every direction, the motorcycle, with its driver half blinded, plowed into the rear of the Toyota, launching the Russian off the seat. Tumbling head-over-heels, he smashed into the top of the Toyota, bounced, and slid off.

Arkadin was already out of the car. He heard the rider groaning, trying to get up off the dirt, and kicked him hard in the side of the head. He was on his way back to the car when the shots struck the fender near him. He ducked; the assault rifle he'd pulled off the dead man in the elevator lay on the passenger's seat out of reach. He tried to crab-walk to the driver's door, but each time he was driven back by shots that plunged into the Toyota's side.

He lay down, scrambled underneath the car as the syrupy, pungent air struck him another hammer blow. Emerging on the opposite side, he hauled open the rear door of the Toyota, and almost got his head shot off. He

dived back under the car to regroup and within seconds realized that he had been given no choice but to abandon the car. Understanding that this was what his adversary wanted, he determined how to neutralize, or at the very least minimize, the mounted Russian's advantage.

For a moment he closed his eyes, picturing where the Russian cyclist must be by the direction from which the bullets came. Then, turning ninety degrees, he pulled himself out from under the Toyota by hooking his fingers around the front bumper.

Bullets caused the windshield to shatter, but due to the safety glass it held together in a spiderweb so complex that it turned the windshield opaque, cutting off his pursuer's view of his escape. Down low was the dense, stinking mass of the homeless, downtrodden, disaffected. He saw their faces as he ran, zigzagging madly through the morass of skeletal humanity, pale as ash. Then he heard the guttural cough of the motorcycle engine through the chatter of Hindi and Urdu. These goddamn people were moving like a sea, parting as he scrambled through their midst, and it was this movement that the Russian was following like the ping on a sonar screen.

In the near distance he could make out a support structure of metal beams attached to the deep-set concrete footings, and he ran toward them. With a throaty roar, the motorcycle broke free of the surf of people, zooming after him, but by that time he had vanished into the jungle gym structure.

The Russian slowed as he approached the beams. To his left was a temporary fence of corrugated iron, already rusting in the gluey Indian air, so he turned to



the right and began a tour around the side of the metal beams. He peered down into the darkness of the abyss into which the massive footings had been set like molars. His AK-47 was at the ready.

He was halfway along when Arkadin, lying along an upper beam like a leopard, leapt onto him. As the Russian's body twisted backward, his hand reflexively squeezed the throttle, and the motorcycle surged forward, its balance off as the momentum of Arkadin's leap tipped its front end up. The chassis accelerated as it spun out from under them, and they were both thrown against the metal beams. The Russian's head struck the middle of a beam, and the AK-47 flew out of his hand. Arkadin tried to lunge at him but discovered that a shard of metal had penetrated the flesh at the back of his thigh all the way to the bone. He was impaled. With a violent wrench that momentarily took his breath away, he pulled the shard out of his leg. The Russian rushed him while he was still seeing sparks in front of his eyes and his breath felt like steam in his lungs. He was pounded by a flurry of blows to the side of the head, his ribs, his sternum before he swung the metal shard around, driving it into the Russian's heart.

The Russian's mouth opened in surprise, his eyes looked at Arkadin with incomprehension, just before they rolled up in his head and he sank to the blood-soaked ground. Arkadin turned and walked toward the ramp to the street, but he felt as if he had been injected with a paralytic. His legs were stiff, barely responding to commands from a brain that seemed increasingly encased in sludge. He felt cold and unfocused. He tried

to catch his breath, couldn't, and fell over.

All around him, it seemed, fires burned, the city was on fire, the night sky was the color of blood, pulsing to the beat of his laboring heart. He saw the eyes of those he'd killed, red as the eyes of rats, crowding in on him. *I don't want to share the darkness with you*, he thought as he felt himself about to plunge into unconsciousness.

And perhaps it was this thought alone that caused him to pause, to take deep breaths, and then, in that moment of repose or weakness, to improbably accept water from those crowding around him, who, he saw now, weren't the familiar dead, but the unfamiliar living. Filthy, ragged, and without hope they might be, but they recognized an underdog when they saw one, and this brought out their innate altruism. Instead of picking him clean like a flock of vultures, they had taken him into their hearts. Isn't it the downtrodden, the ones who can least afford to give up anything, who are more willing to share what they have than the millionaires inhabiting the gated towers on the other side of the city? This was Arkadin's thought as he took their gift of water, in return giving them a wad of rupees from his pocket. Not long after, he felt strong enough to call the local hospital. Then he ripped off an arm of his shirt and wrapped it around his leg to stanch the bleeding in his thigh. There was a pack of boys, runaways or children whose parents had been killed in one of the many sectarian skirmishes that from time to time swept through the neighborhoods, a whirlwind of hate and blood. They watched him as if he were the hero of a video game, as if he were

not quite real. They were afraid of him, but they were also drawn like moths to a flame. He motioned to them and they surged forward as if each one were a leg of some giant insect. They had the Russian's motorcycle in their midst, and he saw that they had it surrounded, that they were protecting it.

'I won't take the bike away from you, it's yours,' he said in Hindi. 'Help me out to the street.'

By then the sound of a siren had become a wail, and with the lost boys supporting him he limped out of the pit into the arms of the medical team, who bundled him into the back of the ambulance, where they laid him down, one of them taking his pulse, checking his heart, while the other began to assess the wound.

Ten minutes later he was being wheeled into the emergency room on a collapsible gurney, then transferred facedown to one of the ER's beds. The arctic air woke him as if from a high fever. He watched the comings and goings in the ER as he was given an injection of local anesthetic, then a surgeon washed his hands in the disinfectant gel from a dispenser affixed to a column, snapped on gloves, and began the process of cleaning, disinfecting, and suturing the wound.

The procedure allowed Arkadin time to reflect on the raid. He knew that it was Dimitri Ilyinovich Maslov who had ordered the assault. Maslov was the head of the Kazanskaya, the Moscow mafia, known colloquially as the *grupperovka*. Maslov was his onetime employer, from whom Arkadin had taken the illegal arms business. This business was critical to Maslov because the Kremlin was coming down hard on the *grupperovka*, slowly

yet inexorably stripping the families of the power base they had built up since glasnost. But over the years Dimitri Maslov had proved himself different from the heads of the other *grupperovka*, who were all either losing power or already in prison. Maslov prospered, even in these difficult times, because he still had the political muscle to defy the authorities or at least keep them at bay. He was a dangerous man and an even more dangerous enemy.

*Yes*, Arkadin thought now, as the surgeon cut the suture cords, *Maslov surely ordered the raid, but he didn't plan it*. Maslov had his hands full with political enemies closing in on all sides; besides, it was a long time since he'd been on the streets and he'd lost that keen edge only the streets can provide. Who, Arkadin asked himself, had he given this job to?

At that moment, as if by divine intervention, he received his answer because, there, standing in the shadows of the ER, unseen or ignored by the hurrying staff and groaning patients, was Vylacheslav Germanovich Oserov, Maslov's new underboss. He and Oserov had a long, vengeful history reaching back to Arkadin's home city of Nizhny Tagil; nothing but hatred and venom lay between them. Still vivid in his memory was their most recent encounter – a nasty incident in the highlands of northern Azerbaijan where he was training a raiding party for Maslov while scheming to double-cross him. He'd called Oserov out, almost beaten him to a pulp – the latest in a long line of violent responses to the atrocities Oserov had perpetrated many years ago in Arkadin's hometown. Of course Oserov was the perfect

man to plan the raid, which, he was certain, included his own death whether or not Maslov had ordered it.

Oserov, who stood in the shadows, arms crossed over his chest, appeared to be looking at nothing, but in fact he was observing Arkadin with the single-minded concentration of a hawk tracking its prey. The face was pocked and scarred, the knotty evidence of murders, street brawls, and near-death encounters, and the corners of his wide, thin-lipped mouth turned up in the familiar hateful smile that seemed both condescending and obscene.

Arkadin was shackled by his trousers. They were rucked around his ankles because it had been too awkward to get them off him completely. He felt no pain in his thigh, of course, but he didn't know how the shot he'd received would affect his ability to sprint or run.

'That's it,' he heard the surgeon say. 'Keep the wound well dry for at least a week. I'm prescribing an antibiotic and a painkiller. You can pick them up from the pharmacy on your way out. You're lucky, the wound was clean-edged and you got here before any infection could set in.' Then the surgeon laughed. 'No marathons for a while, though.'

A nurse applied a surgical pad, which she set in place with surgical tape.

'You shouldn't feel a thing for another hour or so,' she said. 'Be sure to start both your prescriptions before then.'

Oserov unwound his arms and came off the wall. He was still not looking directly at Arkadin, but his right hand was in the pocket of his trousers. Arkadin had no

idea what sort of weapon he carried, but he wasn't about to wait around to find out.

He asked the nurse to help him on with his trousers. When he'd buckled his belt and sat up, she turned to leave. A certain tension came into Oserov's body. As Arkadin slid off the bed onto his feet he whispered in the nurse's ear, 'I'm an undercover cop. That man over there has been sent by criminals to kill me.' When the nurse's eyes opened wide, he added, 'Just do what I tell you and everything will be fine.'

Keeping her between him and Oserov, Arkadin moved to his right. Oserov matched him step for step.

'You're heading away from the exit,' the nurse whispered to him.

Arkadin kept going, nearing the column where the surgeon had disinfected his hands from the dispenser. He could tell the nurse was becoming more and more agitated.

'Please,' she whispered, 'let me call security.'

They were standing beside the column. 'All right,' he said and pushed her so hard she stumbled into a crash cart, sending another nurse and a doctor tumbling. In the confusion he saw a security guard appear from the hallway and Oserov coming toward him, a wicked-looking stiletto in his hand.

Arkadin grabbed the disinfectant dispenser and ripped it free of its brackets. He swung it hard, slamming it into the head of the security guard, who skidded on the linoleum floor as he went down. Tucking the dispenser under one arm, Arkadin vaulted over the guard's prone body and took off for the hallway.

Oserov was right behind him, gaining with every step. Arkadin realized that he had unconsciously slowed his pace, worried that he would rip out the stitches. Disgusted with himself, he shouldered past a pair of startled interns and put on a burst of speed. The hallway in front of him was clear, he dug in his pocket for his lighter, flicked on the flame. Then he pumped disinfectant out of the dispenser's nozzle. He could hear the pounding of Oserov's shoes, almost imagine the quickening of his breath.

All at once he turned and, in one motion, lit the highly flammable sanitizer, thrust out the dispenser, and threw it at his oncoming pursuer. He turned and ran, but the explosion caught him anyway, hurling him half-way down the corridor.

A fire alarm sounded, blasting through the cacophony of shouts, screams, running feet, flailing bodies, and flickering flames. He took off, but slowed to a walk as he rounded a corner. Two security guards and a pack of older doctors pushed by him, nearly knocking him off his feet. Blood started to trickle down his leg, hot and vital. Everything he saw was crystal clear, hard-edged, iridescent, pulsing with life. He held the door open for a woman in a wheelchair who held her baby in her arms. She thanked him and he laughed with such intensity that she laughed, too. At that moment a squad of grim-faced police came off the street through the door he was holding open, rushing right by him.