

# **The Mark of the Assassin Study Guide**

**The Mark of the Assassin by Daniel Silva (novelist)**

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## Plot Summary

Throughout history, politically aware individuals have, at one time or another, contemplated the existence of secret international organizations, comprised of the most wealthy and powerful, which seek to control political, social and economic structures and events. Others have seen smaller conspiracies, following major events, such as presidential assassinations or financial meltdowns. Daniel Silva uses this human tendency to craft a novel which weaves both national politics and international conspiracy into a tale of power, control, greed and intrigue. Michael Osbourne, CIA operative, in investigating a purported Arab terrorist attack on a U.S. airline, is chilled by the method in which the perpetrator has also been assassinated - three shots to the face. Michael is convinced that the assassin is a professional whose identity has never been revealed, but with whom he has a past. This particular assassin, code name "October," is in fact a former KGB operative who is now working as a free agent, following the breakup of the Soviet Union. Michael sets out to pursue this assassin, convinced that the airline attack is not the work of Arab terrorists but, rather, part of an international conspiracy, and that "October" has been contracted to clean up the loose ends by assassinating those who have knowledge of it.

The initial missile attack is actually the work of a secret society of international "players," whose goal is to maintain world tension and to enrich themselves in the process. The major U.S. member is Mitchell Elliott, a defense contractor who is able to use the attack to ensure the re-election of President James Beckwith, a man he can control through associates, White House Chief of Staff Paul Vandenberg and prominent D.C. attorney Sam Braxton. When investigative reporter Susanna Dayton gets too close to the collusion between Mitchell and these associates, she is killed. As well, the Society must order the murder of Michael Osbourne, who is getting too close to the larger conspiracy, as he pursues his old nemesis across Europe to Egypt. Michael and the assassin, "October," finally confront one another, though neither is killed. Michael retires from the CIA, and October escapes to an anonymous life in Greece. The larger conspiracy is not revealed, despite Michael's report to his superior Monica Tyler, who is romantically involved with Mitchell Elliott, and the culprits are not brought to justice. Within the United States, however, Mitchell Elliott has lost his defense contract, Sam Braxton his bid for a cabinet post, and Chief of Staff Vandenberg is dead.



# Prologue

## Prologue Summary

It is 1968, and three Soviet agents, with impeccable Czechoslovakian identities, have been secreted across the border into Austria. The man, woman, and teenager are to present themselves to the Austrian police as escapees from their homeland's Communist regime. Eventually, they will begin their covert activities in the West. The young teen, however, has been groomed for the specialized assassination unit of the KGB. Once the three are over the border and into a rural area, the teen, following orders, kills both the man and the woman, leaving his first trademark hit - three bullets into the face of his victim.

## Prologue Analysis

The prologue lacks importance to the reader at this point and is used primarily to introduce a young man, who, by the age of 16 in 1968, is already a trained assassin for the KGB. He will obviously be operating in this capacity in the West, but ultimate purposes are not given.



# Part 1: October: Chapters 1-4

## Part 1: October: Chapters 1-4 Summary

Off the coast of Long island, New York, two men on a large yacht have been attempting for two nights to shoot down any American passenger jet they are able. Weather has proved an obstacle, but on the third night, all was perfect and Hassan Mahmoud, using the name Abu Jihad, and a freelance member of Hamas, is ready to make his mark. With the excellent cover that they are moving the boat from the Caribbean to Nova Scotia for a wealthy Frenchman, they have remained unmolested by the U.S. Coast Guard. He has never met the other man prior to this assignment, and they have had little conversation, other than to speak of the stinger with a built-in guidance system that will seek out and destroy a target easily. Mahmoud takes a Boston Whaler, which is tied to the yacht, and ventures out to complete the act. Upon his return to the yacht, Mahmoud is shot three times in the face by the stranger, who then fires up the yacht and sets in an easterly direction. By morning, he has left the yacht in another small boat tied to it and is picked up by a helicopter, as he detonates the charge that blows the yacht into pieces.

Chapter 2 begins with President James Beckwith being notified of the strike, while vacationing at his home in San Francisco. Beckwith is running for re-election, somewhat reluctantly, but urged by his wife to do so. He is a moderate Republican and has substantial opposition from the Democratic candidate, Senator Andrew Sterling, who is already ahead in the polls. Beckwith realizes that, with this attack and with his rapid and professional response to it, he may very well turn the lead around and become a hero with the electorate. He will be consulting with Paul Vandenberg, his chief of staff, regarding the response measures, for he has trusted Vandenberg to run just about his entire Presidency.

Chapter 3 introduces the other major characters of the plot. Elizabeth Osbourne is a career attorney with a Washington, D.C. firm, the managing partner of which is Samuel Braxton, her boss. While Braxton has never cared for Elizabeth or her liberal political leanings, he has learned to accept her brilliance and effectiveness as an attorney. Elizabeth is married to Michael, a CIA agent who has been "retired" from the field and now operates in administration at headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Elizabeth has an appointment with a fertility specialist, who suggests that in vitro fertilization is the best chance for a pregnancy. Meanwhile, Max, her assistant, has telephoned to inform her that she is to attend a mandatory party being hosted by the firm's largest client, Mitchell Elliott, CEO of Alatron Defense Systems.

Chapter 4: Mitchel Elliott has several homes, one of which is in Kalorama, an upscale neighborhood in D.C. A deeply religious man, Elliott believes that God has guided him to his current position, and that he has a mission to build an aircraft and to exert influence in the political arena, primarily to keep America strong by building both attack and defense systems. He is picked up by a limousine and driven to the White House for



dinner. Following behind is Susanna Dayton, reporter for the Washington Post, who focuses primarily on the connection between money and politics. Trained as a lawyer, she loves "connecting the dots" to determine which organizations and corporations funded which politicians, whether these contributions were legal and, in the end, to determine when and if these contributors influenced public policy and/or legislation. Currently, Susanna is investigating the cozy relationship between Mitchell Elliott and the White house. So far, she has uncovered that Elliott has funneled millions to James Beckwith, both legally and questionably. Further, Paul Vandenberg was a former executive with Elliott's corporation. Susanna knows that Elliott and Vandenberg both have too much influence in the White House but has so far been unable to obtain documented proof of this. Thus, she follows and makes notes.

## **Part 1: October: Chapters 1-4 Analysis**

In these first four chapters, a major terrorist event is introduced which appears, from the names and type of attack, to be the work of radical Islamists. The oddity for the reader, however, is that these two conspirators apparently do not know one another, and, in the end, one kills the shooter and is rescued from the scene by a helicopter. Obviously, the shooter is the "fall" guy.

In introducing other major characters, the author is quick to reveal the loose connections among them. Michael Osbourne, a field retired CIA operative is married to Elizabeth, who is a prominent attorney, working for managing partner Sam Braxton, whose major client is Mitchell Elliot, defense contractor and heavy contributor to President Beckwith's campaign. As well, the President's Chief of Staff, Paul Vandenberg, has formerly worked with Elliott at his corporation, Alatron Defense Systems, at least indirectly, then, all of these individuals are inter-connected. President Beckwith is presented as a rather reluctant candidate, running for a second term only because of pressure from his wife and Vandenberg. He does not appear to be a strong leader and relies heavily on Vandenberg and his wife. Elizabeth Osbourne, although a successful attorney, obviously is ready to begin a family with husband Michael, although he has failed to keep the appointment with the fertility specialist, probably due to the massive response and investigation into the airline bombing.

Much time is spent expanding the character of Mitchell Elliott's, during these first chapters. He is portrayed as a "mover and shaker" in Washington politics, and one who appears to exert significant influence over President Beckwith. At the same time, he is one of those unbalanced individuals who believes that he has a direct mission from God to do the work he does, in order to keep his country safe. For Elliott, it appears, the end justifies the means, even if it involves illegal contributions to Beckwith's campaign and frequent visits to the White house, all of which is promoted and supervised by friend Paul Vandenberg.



# Part One: October: Chapters 5-8

## Part One: October: Chapters 5-8 Summary

This section opens with the arrival of a fax at the office of the London Times, a message which is immediately passed on to Britain's Security Service and Secret Intelligence Service. Ultimately, it is forwarded to CIA headquarters and distributed to several offices, including that of Michael Osbourne, the officer assigned to a Muslim terrorist group known as the Sword of Gaza.

Chapter 6 focuses on the background of Michael Osbourne and his immediate response to the airline strike. He is not at CIA headquarters by choice. A former field agent, his identity had been compromised, and he was forced back to a desk job. He is housed with several other officers, each with a specific terrorist watch assignment. He has received the fax from London and a forensics report on the whaler found drifting with a dead body on board. He proceeds to the briefing room to present his report to his superiors at midnight. First, Mike presents the background on Hassa Mahmoud, who had joined the Sword of Gaza, as an expert gunman and bomb maker. He believes the dead body on the whaler is Mahmoud. Additional evidence shows the whaler being towed by a yacht, from the Caribbean up the Eastern coast. Michael's theory is that the yacht remained in international waters, while Mahmoud took the whaler in toward Long Island to make the strike. He was then killed. There is no trace of the yacht, and he is waiting for satellite images to perhaps give more information.

This particular act is not typical of the Sword of Gaza, which is a small group, focused on assassinations of political and business leaders. Michael believes something stinks about the entire incident. As well, Mahmoud was shot three times in the face, an obvious reminder to Michael of a previous incident. His supervisor and friend, Adrian Carter, warns Michael not to go looking for his "jackal" again and to "let it go."

Michael finally returns to his Georgetown home to find an angry Elizabeth who had to go to the doctor alone earlier in the day. She informs him that they will be attempting one more procedure at Cornell Medical Center in New York, and that his attendance will be mandatory. He agrees and then briefly explains the reason for his lateness. This brings the conversation to Sarah, a former lover who was evidently murdered in the same way as Mahmoud.

Chapter 7 returns to the White House, where Beckwith and his wife are dining with Mitchell Elliott. Elliott is convinced that, if this terrorist attack is handled well, Beckwith will rise in the polls and ultimately be re-elected. As he and Beckwith retire to the oval office with Vandenberg, Elliott insists that they pray, and then he will reveal the plan guaranteed to ensure Beckwith's win.

Mitchell and Vandenberg leave in the same car to return to their mansions in Kalorama. Elliott requests that his body guard run an identification check on a small Toyota that



has been following them, and it is revealed to be that of Susanna Dayton. Elliott then orders surveillance, a search of her home, and the bugging of her phone lines, telling Vandenberg that they may have a "small problem."

Susanna Dayton lives on a small street in Georgetown. She arrives home, as Chapter 8 opens, to record, in her computer, Mitchell Elliott's three-hour visit to the White House and his car ride with Paul Vandenberg, following her usual procedure, she encrypts the file and makes two copies. One she puts through the mailbox of her neighbor, Harry Scanlon, as she leaves for her evening jog with her dog. During her absence, a stranger enters her home, leaving fifteen minutes later, leaving no trace of his presence. It is quite late, as the scene then shifts to Michael Osbourne. Michael is at his computer while Elizabeth sleeps, reviewing assassinations over many years, all of which bear a singular trademark - three shots to the face. The final kill was that of Sarah Randolph, a leftist art student with whom he had fallen in love while working in London. That murder lead the CIA to conclude that Michael's cover had been "blown," and he was returned to a desk job at Langley. Michael is convinced that the murder of Mahmoud is by the same assassin.

## Part One: October: Chapters 5-8 Analysis

Mitchell Elliott is a man with clear purpose and the resources to be certain that his rather shadowy influence in the White House is never made public. His influence on Beckwith, fully supported by Vandenberg, is a bit strange, considering that Elliott insists upon praying prior to discussing the response to the air strike. While the reader is not informed of the details of the planned response, it is obvious that Elliott and Vandenberg have devised the plan, with the goal of Beckwith's re-election. So focused is Elliott, moreover, that he sees a Washington Post reporter as a potential threat and immediately sets out to steal whatever he can find in her home and bug her telephone line. At this point, he considers Susanna Dayton a minor problem but is certainly not willing to risk her possible investigation into his and Vandenberg's activities.

Michael Osbourne is focusing on the method of murder of the young Muslim. Three shots to the face remind him of an earlier nemesis, whom he pursued while still in the field. Evidently, this nemesis is a long-term foe who has not struck in several years. Michael is considering the possibility that this assassin has re-surfaced, thus, his late night computer search into the trademark assassinations of which Sarah, his former love had been the last until now.





# Part One: October: Chapters 9-10

## Part One: October: Chapters 9-10 Summary

Chapter 9 reveals further links between the major characters. Vandenburg's role as White House Chief of Staff is much stronger than would normally be acceptable. Having been a close friend and ally of the weak Beckwith for twenty years, he is now calling the shots, selling Beckwith on policies and plans after he has determined what they should be. He now must sell Beckwith on a tough response to the airline strike, and envisions no problem in doing so.

The relationship between Susanna Dayton and Elizabeth is also revealed. Law school colleagues, they have remained close friends and run together every morning. During this morning's run, Susanna has a favor to ask. She is certain that Mitchell Elliot is funneling money to the Republicans by surreptitious means and that Sam Braxton, Elizabeth's boss, is assisting him. She asks Elizabeth to conduct some snooping, an act Elizabeth refuses to commit, due to her strict adherence to attorney-client privilege. Behind them, another jogger is wearing a high frequency headpiece, listening to their conversation. Elizabeth reveals that she will be attending a mandatory dinner party held by Mitchell Elliott this evening. As the jog continues, Beckwith, Vandenberg, and Elliott are meeting at the White House to finalize the details of the American response prior to a televised statement to the public. Satellite photos have revealed three training camps for the Sword of Gaza, and all three will be the target of American military action.

Elliott's party, the focus of Chapter 10, includes primarily Republican leaders, Sam Braxton, and Elizabeth. Prior to the meal, they gather around the television to hear Beckwith's speech, announcing the three strikes, occurring as he is speaking. As well, he proposes a new missile defense system for the U.S. and urges Congress to act on the bill immediately and to budget the necessary funds to build it.

Beckwith's Democratic opponent, Senator Edward Sterling, holds views typical of a liberal - more money for social programs, less money for wars and defense, and higher taxes on the wealthy and on corporations. He holds a fragile 5 point lead over Beckwith. Beckwith's speech has pushed Sterling into a corner. If he opposes the missile defense shield, he will be portrayed as "soft" on enemies, and he will lose California, due to the large defense industry based there. From an ideological standpoint, however, he is opposed to this increase in defense spending.

All over the world, Beckwith's speech is broadcast, and the results of the air strikes are reported as well, with mixed responses, as follows:

1. At CIA headquarters, Michael Osbourne and his colleagues, watching the strikes via satellite, realize that peace in the Middle East is now a remote future dream.



2. Israeli Mossad Deputy Director, Ari Shamron, is pleased with the action, realizing that peace talks between his prime minister and Arab leaders are now dead and concludes that this is the best million dollars he has ever spent.

3. At SVR (former KGB) headquarters in Moscow, General Constantin Kalnikov is pleased as well. The decline in Russia's power has meant that he has little money to perform his duties. As a result, he has become involved in the Russian mob and is currently profiting from the illegal sale of weapons the world over. He will now have many customers and concludes that this latest crisis has been worth the million dollars he has spent.

Elizabeth Osbourne has returned from the dinner party and continues to re-play a scene in her mind. The image of Sam Braxton and Mitchell Elliott, happy as larks, laughing and toasting one another all evening, has lead her to believe that they are certainly pleased with Beckwith's response to the crisis.

## **Part One: October: Chapters 9-10 Analysis**

The power of Vandenberg is worrisome, especially if he is so close to Mitchell Elliott, an individual who obviously provides financial support to the Republican Party and who is in a position to obtain defense contracts. The fact that Vandenberg and Elliott have planned Beckwith's response to the crisis and have subsequently "sold" it to the President speaks to both the weakness of Beckwith and to the conspiratorial nature of Vandenberg's and Elliott's relationship. The entire crisis becomes a bit suspect, when it is clear who will benefit from it. As well, it appears that there are individuals in other parts of the world who have contributed money to affect this crisis, that is, paid for the operation. Because one is Israeli and one is Russian, the hint is clearly there that this incident is not simply the result of one Muslim extremist group. The involvement of Sam Braxton is still not clear, although, as Elizabeth clearly observes at the dinner party, they seem unusually happy with Beckwith's response to the attack. Perhaps Elliott stands to make a great deal of money through this new missile defense shield project and Braxton, of course, maintains his most lucrative client.

Susanna Dayton believes that she can uncover information that will reveal the illegal campaign contributions of Elliott to Beckwith and the Republican Party and truly wants the assistance of her long-term friend Elizabeth. Elizabeth, however, declines, and demonstrates that she is an attorney who takes her ethical responsibilities seriously. While she does not care for Sam Braxton, and is certainly suspicious of his and Elliott's relationship, she is not willing to compromise her principles.



## Part Two: November: Chapters 11-15

### Part Two: November: Chapters 11-15 Summary

In the next 5 chapters, the reader moves from America to other parts of the world, and is introduced to yet another major figure in the plot.

Chapter 11 begins on Shelter Island at the home of Senator Douglas Cannon, Elizabeth's father. Now a widower and retired, he spends most of his time at the family mansion on the island, and Michael and Elizabeth are frequent visitors. It is now November, and Beckwith has been re-elected, announcing as well that he is nominating Sam Braxton for Secretary of State. The other winner of this election is Mitchell Elliott, who stands to make billions on the new missile defense project. Senator Cannon is vehemently opposed to the defense project, stating that it is only the method by which Paul Vandenberg repays heavy contributors. He also informs Michael that Vandenberg was once an executive with Alatron and, as well, was in the CIA during Vietnam. Recalling the story on which Susanna Dayton is currently working, Michael decides to do a little digging of his own into the background of Vandenberg.

Chapter 12 is set on the island of St. Maarten in the Caribbean, the meeting place of the Society for International Development and Cooperation, a secret group of the world's wealthy and powerful. The primary focus of the group is to maintain tension and conflict in the world, so that world leaders remain vigilant and so that certain individuals, themselves included, are able to amass fortunes. Among those in attendance are Ari Shamron, Kalnikov and Mitchell Elliott. They are congratulating themselves on pulling off the plane bombing, having used a professional "hit" man to murder the perpetrator afterward, in order to avoid a capture which might reveal that the Sword of Gaza was not, indeed, behind the deed. To further ensure confidentiality, moreover, Elliott proposes the murder of 4 additional individuals who know of the plot, and the group agrees. They will use the same assassin and then kill him as well.

Chapter 13 provides the reader with the assassin's current identity. Jean Paul Delaroche, known in the village of Breles, France as "Le Solitaire," is a recluse whose occupation and/or purpose remain a complete mystery to the townsfolk. He lives in an isolated cottage overlooking the English Channel and keeps the company of only a parade of beautiful women who stay for very short periods. Delaroche was once a KGB operative, but, with the fall of the Soviet Union, he was cast aside. Together with his former "handler," Arbatov, he has created an independent assassination business, Arbatov acting as the middleman so that Delaroche never will be seen by his employers. He receives a signal from Arbatov that a new contract has been proposed, specifically, multiple assassinations. Delaroche is ambivalent about this contract, but intrigued. His largest concern is that his "employer" wants to meet in person to discuss the murders, and Delaroche has never allowed this.



Chapter 14 moves briefly back to CIA headquarters, where Michael is a bit on the hot seat for attempting to access CIA files on Paul Vandenberg. Michael feigns "interest only" and states that he has nothing further to disclose about the matter.

Moving back to France in Chapter 15, Delaroche arrives in Paris, motivated by interest and four million dollars. He has arrived a day early in order to scope out the meeting place and, with luck, the individual with whom he is to meet. The following day, he meets with his contact in a flat and is given an encrypted disk to read, regarding the four assassinations he is to commit and the method of payment once each kill is completed. The disk contains information relative to the identities, personal data and habits of the four targets. By telephone, he confirms the deposit of the down payment into his account and then, as instructed, kills the messenger, as his first hit. He determines that, at this point, he must also kill Arbatov, to secure his own anonymity, and does so that very evening, before returning home.

## **Part Two: November: Chapters 11-15 Analysis**

The conspiracy is revealed. An international organization of elite political and financial leaders is not a particularly new or unique concept among authors, and, indeed, certain contemporary groups of people. In this instance, moreover, the activities of the Society have resulted in the deaths of innocent Americans and a Muslim extremist pawn. This group thoroughly accepts the notion that it is so superior in thinking and intelligence that whatever it must do to achieve its ends is fully justified. This places them necessarily above the law of any country, with complete disregard for any human rights.

It appears that Delaroche is the individual used to assassinate the Muslim lad and will now be used to assassinate individuals outside of the Society who have knowledge of the details of the incident. Delaroche himself is a study in contrasts. He is reclusive and an obviously skilled assassin but lives a simple life, engaged in his hobby of painting. He is, however, motivated by money and sees this new assignment as the ticket to a more than comfortable retirement. Because this will be his last contract, moreover, he decides to murder his "agent/handler," so that there will be no trail leading to him.

Michael is becoming intrigued by Paul Vandenberg's background, having been informed by his father-in-law that Vandenberg was both a former executive with Alatron and in the CIA during Vietnam. Michael is aware of Susanna Dayton's investigation and determines to begin one of his own. His efforts are thwarted, however, as he is unable to access Vandenberg's file at headquarters and is then questioned about it. His suspicion grows.



## Part II: November: Chapters 16-21

### Part II: November: Chapters 16-21 Summary

Susanna Dayton, feeling pressure from her editor to find more documentation and evidence to support her suspicions about the Elliot, Vandenberg, and Beckwith connections, has compiled what she believes to be premier piece of journalistic investigation. She has discovered that Elliott had urged Beckwith to remain in politics with the promise of great wealth. To that end, Elliott brokered financial and real estate deals, structured by Sam Braxton. Prior to turning in her piece, Susanna decides to telephone Vandenberg and Elliott for statements. Vandenberg charges her with shoddy journalism, and one of Elliott's aides states that he will get back to her. Elliott, however, directs his assistant, Mark Callahan, to get into Dayton's home and take everything. Susanna leaves for her evening jog, injures her ankle, and returns home, surprising Callahan. Ultimately, as Chapter 16 ends, Susanna and her dog are killed, all disks removed, and her purse is taken to feign a robbery.

Chapter 17: Delaroche now has three hits remaining, and he realizes that he will need a female accomplice. Two of the three targets are womanizers. He destroys any trace of existence within his cottage and travels to Amsterdam and to Astrid Vogel, a woman with whom he has a past. Astrid, too, has a past. Born in Germany, she had moved with her mother to Switzerland. As she grew up, she came to know that her grandfather was a secret anti-Nazi conspirator. Becoming obsessed with his story and work, she returned to Germany and became a member of the Communist Party there, a group that insisted the Nazis still ran Germany. Having engaged in leftist terrorist activities throughout the world, she has now settled in Amsterdam, working in a small bookstore and living on a boat in one of the canals. Delaroche arrives and explains the contract, giving her the details of the targets and promising to pay her one million dollars for her assistance.

Chapter 18: Worried that Susanna has not arrived for their usually morning jog, Elizabeth retrieves a house key from neighbor Harry Scanlon, and together they discover the body. While it looks like a robbery, Elizabeth is curious about two things. First, Susanna had called her the previous day, stating that she needed to speak with Elizabeth about an extremely important matter, and Harry reveals that he has a backup disk of a story Susanna was working on. Elizabeth takes the disk and, that evening, she and Michael are able to break the encryption code, accessing the investigative piece and all of Susanna's research.

Chapter 19: Delaroche and Astrid have completed planning the assassinations and leave Amsterdam for London, using Dutch passports and altering their appearances. Target number one is Colin Yardley, a soon-to-be-retired British intelligence field officer. Yardley has become a careless womanizer who drinks too much at the same bar every night. He is an easy mark for Astrid, who has glamorized herself and teases him unmercifully, finally agreeing to accompany him to his home. Delaroche is not far behind



and, upon entering Yardley's home, shoots him three times in the face. The couple returns to Amsterdam, where Delaroche sends an encrypted message to his employers, and one million dollars is wired to his account in Zurich. Yardley's body is found, and a phone call to the BBC insists that the Irish Republican Army is claiming responsibility for the murder.

Chapter 20: Learning the details of Yardley's murder, Michael insists upon going to London. Elizabeth is unhappy because the artificial insemination procedure is to occur in two days and, as well, she suspects that this assassination is connected to the murder of Michael's former love, a woman she feels he has never let go. Michael arrives in London, makes a courtesy call to the Embassy and then proceeds to the home of Graham Seymour, an English agent with whom he worked closely and who is now a close personal friend. Graham informs Michael that Yardley had been observed purchasing a stinger missile from a Muslim arms dealer in Paris. Further, because the British Secret Service could no longer trust Yardley, it had installed a secret video camera. Astrid's seduction and the assassination have been caught on tape and, upon viewing it, Michael is convinced that the assassin is the same man who killed Sarah years before. He decides that his next step is to speak to a Russian double agent, named Drozdov, now living outside London. On his way, he stops along the Thames and recalls his time there with Sarah and her murder at the hands of a pale-skinned, slender-nosed assassin who shot her three times in the face.

Chapter 21 reveals Michael's history with Sarah. While an operative in London, they developed a romantic relationship, which he kept from his handler, Adrian Carter, primarily because of Sarah's lifestyle and politics. To Sarah, he was an international businessman. Today, he is traveling to the small town where Sarah had lived, in order to meet with Drozdov, and realizes he is being followed. Michael finds Drozdov in a small cafe, and, providing a list of former assassinations with the same trademark, is told that they are the work of a former KGB assassin, known as "October." October was taken as a young boy and trained for this work, sent to the West as a refugee from Czechoslovakia, and eventually settled in Paris, receiving assignments. His handler, Arbatov is dead, so October is now working on his own. They both conclude that the murder of Yardley was to wipe the trail of the stinger missile. Drozdov further reveals that Sarah was, in fact, a KGB operative, assigned to Michael. Her mistake was falling in love with him, and she had to be eliminated. October was used for the job.

As Michael returns to the airport for his trip home, three gunmen enter the airport, and chaos ensues. Michael, in the midst of a conversation with Elizabeth, abruptly hangs up.

## **Part II: November: Chapters 16-21 Analysis**

This section begins to put the pieces together and further reveals the lengths to which Elliott will go in order to protect his position and his wealth. Killing Susanna, however, does not kill her story, as Michael and Elizabeth have de-coded the disk and will turn the piece over to her editor.



The reader is introduced to Astrid Vogel, a woman who appears to have retired from earlier leftist terrorist activities but who, obviously, has a past with Delaroche, whose code name is revealed to be "October." The relationship has involved both work and romance, and it appears that perhaps Delaroche truly cares about this woman. Once they complete the first assassination in London, and news reaches CIA headquarters, Michael knows that he must participate in the investigation, haunted still by the knowledge that the murderer of his first love is back in operation. This time, he vows, he will catch him. Unauthorized by his superiors at Langley, Michael will become an operative once again, and Elizabeth is angry and disappointed that he has made this choice. She is obviously jealous of the memory of a dead woman and believes that Michael has never fully let Sarah go. This, to Elizabeth, forms a breach in their marriage.

The meeting with Drozdov provides some shocking information to Michael. First, he learns that Sarah was, in fact, a KGB agent, assigned to him because both the KGB and she knew that he was a CIA operative. Second, he learns at least the code name of the assassin, and has at least caught a glimpse of him on a videotape, during the murder of Yardley. He and Drozdov both recognize Astrid Vogel, as well. In addition, someone has had Michael followed, though neither he nor the reader knows who, but the airport attack may, in fact, be a "cover" in order to kill Michael, whose investigation may be getting a bit too close.



## Part II: November, Chapters 22-29

### Part II: November, Chapters 22-29 Summary

A short Chapter 22 reveals that the Director of the Society has given Elliott the green light to kill Osbourne. As well, Ivan Drozdov is summarily murdered at his cottage.

Chapter 23 returns to the chaotic scene at Heathrow Airport, as Michael dodges gunfire and grenades. While security guards manage to kill two of the perpetrators, Michael pursues the third, rendering him unconscious and killing the getaway car driver. The death and injury toll at Heathrow is large, and the Sword of Gaza has claimed responsibility, claiming retaliation for American attacks on their bases. Michael has become a hero in both England and the U.S. and is taken to the American Embassy, being told that the Sword of Gaza has requested a meeting with him the following day on the Dover to Calais Ferry. During a teleconference with the President, Michael expresses his desire to hold the meeting. Beckwith gives permission over Vandenberg's strong objection.

Chapter 24 finds Michael in London, realizing that he will miss his appointment with Elizabeth for the in vitro procedure. Further, he is unhappy that he is now guarded by two "watchers" and must stay in a safe house. He does manage to get to the Seymour's, however, to call Elizabeth and give an update, insisting upon the importance of the impending meeting.

Chapter 25: Back in Washington, Vandenberg is visited by a D.C. police detective, who has checked Susanna Dayton's phone records and realizes that she called Vandenberg prior to her death. Vandenberg gives a cursory response about his comment on her investigative piece, but is clearly troubled. He meets with Elliott and is furious to learn that Dayton's murder was an unintended, but necessary, consequence. As the conversation continues, Vandenberg realizes that Elliott was probably complicit in the plane bombing, and he becomes distraught over the terrible decisions he has made in order to assist Beckwith's re-election.

Chapter 26 returns to London, with Michael on the ferry, secretly accompanied by Graham Seymour. He meets with Sword of Gaza leader Awad. Michael knows of Awad, who has obviously altered his appearance. He grew up in a Palestinian refugee camp after his family's orchards were taken by Zionists in 1948. Awad confirms that his group attacked Heathrow but denies any part in the plane attack. Awad then presents Michael with photos of Mahmoud, who had been ejected from the Sword of Gaza, and Eric Stoltenberg, a freelance international mercenary who sells his services to anyone, meeting at a cafe. Awad suggests that Michael look closer to home and to ask himself who would truly profit from the situation. A motor yacht is alongside the ferry, and a masked man pulls a gun. Michael's attempt to save Awad is unsuccessful, and, prior to dying, Awad detonates an explosive, seriously damaging the ferry. Both Graham and Michael believe that the bullet was meant for Michael.





Chapter 27: In New York, Elizabeth learns about the ferry bombing as she is being prepared for her procedure with Michael's frozen sperm. She undergoes the procedure not knowing if Michael is dead or alive.

Chapter 28: The bombed ferry makes its way to Calais, with Michael and Graham surrounded by boat security and crew members. Elizabeth has been informed that Michael is safe and on his way back to London, and another teleconference, this time with Adrian Carter and Monica Tyler, results in a formal reprimand for including Seymour in the task. Michael reveals all that Awad has told him, but holds back on the photos, desiring to pursue some avenues himself. He is ordered back to Washington by Monica, where he is to be placed on administrative leave pending an investigation of his activities. Further, Wheaton, Michael's London handler, and two others are to guard him until he leaves the following morning. Thwarting these three, Michael makes his way to Graham Seymour's home, obtains money and false passports, and purchases a ticket to Rome. Graham will inform Elizabeth of his whereabouts.

Chapter 29: The society Director is unhappy that the assassination attempt on Michael has failed. He and Elliott decide to add Michael to October's list.

## **Part II: November, Chapters 22-29 Analysis**

While his response at Heathrow has made him a hero in two countries, Michael is uncomfortable being placed in the limelight. He prefers working independently and in secret, and convinces Beckwith that he alone should meet with the Sword of Gaza leader. Internally, Michael is struggling with the fact that, for the first time in his life, he has actually killed someone. While the initial adrenaline rush gives him a feeling of power, the eventual reflection upon the taking of another life, not matter how evil, is abhorrent to him.

Once Michael speaks with Awad, he knows what the reader has earlier been told. The plane bombing was not the work of the Sword of Gaza. The Society, moreover, is intent upon preventing Michael from revealing this information to anyone else, but the murder attempt is failure. It is now time to bring in the true professional, and Elliott is thus given the approval to turn the assassination over to October.

Monica Tyler's anger with Michael is a bit strong for the infraction he has committed, specifically, involving friend Graham Seymour in the ferry meeting. She is so angry, in fact, that she orders him home with the threat of placing him on administrative leave, pending a full investigation. The reader is left to wonder exactly what a full investigation will involve, particularly since Michael has provided important information, specifically, that the Sword of Gaza was not responsible for the airline attack. Michael demonstrates his love for field work and his commitment to following his own instincts, by deciding not to reveal the connection between Mahmoud and an international mercenary and by outwitting his "handlers," in order to defy Monica and pursue his own investigation.



## Part II: November, Chapters 30-35

### Part II: November, Chapters 30-35 Summary

Delaroche and Astrid are in Cairo, preparing for the assassination of Eric Stoltenberg. They have studied his routine, and Astrid makes contact at his favorite night club and introduces herself as tourist Eva Tebbe. Eventually, they leave together, followed by Delaroche on a stolen motorcycle. Unfortunately, Stoltenberg knows Astrid's true identity and has his driver take them to the desert, as he attempts to discover who hired her. When the driver gets out of the car, he is immediately murdered by Delaroche, who then enters the car and kills Stoltenberg. Back at their hotel, Astrid is ready to quit, having faced the possibility of her own death. Delaroche promises her that, once the contracts are completed, they will retire together in the Caribbean.

By Chapter 31, Michael is also in Cairo, following the trail of Stoltenberg. He is informed by a former "mole" that Stoltenberg has been found dead, but he is able to view videotapes of Cairo airport arrivals. Michael is able to identify Astrid Vogel but still cannot identify the man with her, whom he knows must be October. His only choice now is to return to the states and face the music with his supervisors.

Delaroche and Astrid return to Amsterdam, where he travels to town to access his email. The money from the Cairo job has been wired, and he is asked to commit one additional assassination for 1.5 million. He accepts and is immediately given the full dossier on Michael Osbourne, a man he knows, having confronted him once before. As Chapter 32 ends, he and Astrid are enjoying a lovely meal.

Chapter 34 & 35 find Michael back at Shelter Island explaining everything to Elizabeth. He has obviously decided to recount all of what he has discovered and believes to his superiors, hoping that they will understand why it was critical that he not return as instructed. While Monica is not moved by his arguments, she does reluctantly agree to broaden the investigation, in order to determine whether someone other than the Sword of Gaza was responsible for the airline disaster. She places Michael on leave anyway, stating that his direct disobedience must result in consequences, thus effectively removing Michael from participation in this "broadened" investigation. Her true motives become clear, however, once the reader is informed that she is engaged in an affair with Mitchell Elliott and already knows what Michael has discovered. Elliott is unconcerned, as Chapter 35 ends, however, because Monica will obviously direct the investigation away from him, and "October" will soon take care of Michael.

### Part II: November, Chapters 30-35 Analysis

Michael remains one step behind Delaroche but is beginning to surmise that October is now killing individuals who have been involved in the initial airline attack, most certainly to cover the tracks for the real culprits. He is at a bit of a dead end, however, for he has



no idea where Delaroché will strike next. His only choice now is to return to Langley for assistance from others.

Michael has obviously decided to recount all of what he has discovered and of what he believes to his superiors, hoping that they will understand why it was critical that he not return as instructed. While Monica is not moved by his arguments, she does reluctantly agree to broaden the investigation, in order to determine whether someone other than the Sword of Gaza was responsible for the airline disaster. She places Michael on leave anyway, stating that his direct disobedience must result in consequences, thus effectively removing Michael from participation in this "broadened" investigation. Her true motives become clear, however, once the reader is informed that she is engaged in an affair with Mitchell Elliott and already knows what Michael has discovered. Elliott is unconcerned, however, because Monica will obviously direct the investigation away from him and "October" will soon take care of Michael.



## Part III: December, Chapters 36-41

### Part III: December, Chapters 36-41 Summary

This series of short chapters brings the reader closer to the climax.

In Chapter 36, Delaroche and Astrid have been flown into a remote part of Canada, where an equipped Range Rover awaits, so that they may begin the trip toward the U.S. border and the ultimate assassination of Michael Osbourne.

Michael, meanwhile, is spending his first day at home, without much to do. Eventually, he returns to his office, in order to clean out his personal effects. There, others avoid eye contact with him, but Adrian Carter presents him with a gift-wrapped package, telling him to open it at home. Michael then goes with Elizabeth to the Georgetown University Medical Center, where a sonogram confirms twin fetuses. Arriving home, at the end of Chapter 37, Elizabeth, intrigued by the package from Adrian, opens it to discover that it is, in fact, the CIA file on "October."

By Chapter 38, Delaroche and Astrid are on foot, because they must cross the border into the U.S. in a remote area of Vermont. During their walk, Delaroche reminisces about his life as an assassin, recounting his first two murders, those of the two Russians who escorted him across the Austrian border when he was just a teenager. Another Range Rover awaits them on the U.S. side, which they will use to drive to D.C.

Elizabeth receives a call from Tom Logan, Susanna Dayton's editor. He wants to meet with her, and Michael insists upon going along. Believing they are being tailed, Michael picks up Logan and then drives erratically through the streets, losing his tail and ending at Lincoln Park. The "tail" reports back to Callahan, who now agrees with Elliott that they need to take action quickly. Logan recaps Susanna's investigation for Elizabeth and Michael, beginning with the personal history of President Beckwith. Beckwith's wife wanted him out of politics and back into private industry where he could make more money. Elliott had groomed Beckwith for politics and was not about to allow this. He met with Anne Beckwith and promised her several things. While it cannot be proved, it appears that Elliott was able to get Anne several consulting positions, the money from which she used to purchase desert land south of San Diego which, coincidentally, was then purchased by a developer. Anne made a killing. According to Logan, Elliott then looked for a lawyer who understood and could circumvent campaign finance laws. He found Elizabeth's boss, Sam Braxton. Upset that Beckwith was losing the election and the fact that Congress was "cooling" on the idea of a new missile defense system, Elliott was thrilled with the airliner crisis, an event that achieved both of his goals. The remainder of Dayton's piece outlines the close relationship between Elliott, Vandenberg, and Braxton.

The remainder of Chapter 39 details Logan's pleas for Elizabeth's assistance in obtaining copies of original documents that Susanna had from Braxton's office but which



are now missing. At first, Elizabeth refuses, but Logan's argument that these documents could bring truly corrupt individuals into the spotlight convinces her. As well, Logan promises that he will never reveal that Elizabeth is the source.

Chapter 40: Delaroche and Astrid have traveled from Vermont to D.C., and he is planning Michael's assassination in their hotel room.

Chapter 41: Michael and Elizabeth have deduced that Susanna's "source" at the law office must have been Max, Elizabeth's assistant. When confronted, Max admits that he was indeed helping Dayton, justifying his actions with the fact that Braxton is a crook and is attempting to have him fired because he is HIV positive. Elizabeth informs Max that they are going to return to the office and retrieve the files again.

### **Part III: December, Chapters 36-41 Analysis**

Delaroche is wasting no time getting to Washington to complete his work and finally retire. As he reminisces, going back to the first murders committed at the directive of his KGB mentor, it appears that, although he may have had some initial regret but that it quickly passed, and he has become no more than a man seeking his fortune so that he may retire in comfort. Michael Osbourne will be his last job.

It appears that Susanna Dayton had been able to put together quite a detailed report on the connections among some of the conspirators, and that she received assistance from Max, once Elizabeth had turned down her request. While the piece certainly will ruin careers and perhaps prevent Elliott from obtaining the defense contract, it does not expose the Society and its despicable acts, and the airline attack remains unsolved. For her part, Elizabeth is now ready to assist in bringing down her boss and preventing him from becoming the next Secretary of State.



## Part III: December, Chapters 42-45

### Part III: December, Chapters 42-45 Summary

Anne Beckwith has long ago devised a method of slipping out of the White House alone, without normal security, in order to enjoy the company of old friends. Tonight, she is paying Mitchell Elliott a non-social visit. Anne informs Elliott that, if Susanna Dayton's story is ever published, she will see to it that her husband's name is left untarnished and that Elliott will take the "fall" for everything. An additional piece of fallout is that Mitchell will lose the missile defense contract.

As Anne and Elliott meet, Elizabeth and Max are back at the law office, Elizabeth using Max's ill-gotten keys to get to Braxton's files on Elliott and Beckwith. Unfortunately, they have been removed, and Elizabeth is caught by a tall, blond custodian, who obviously does not look the part. Leaving the office, she insists that she was simply returning some files. The "custodian" follows Elizabeth and Max to a local restaurant, where he contacts Elliott's assistant, Callahan, who indicates that someone will soon relieve him.

Chapter 43 opens the following morning, as Delaroche sits in DuPont Circle, observing the bicycle couriers, so that he may imitate their dress and mannerisms. Posing as a courier, he bicycles to Michael Osbourne's home, riding back and forth, until Michael leaves for his daily run. He has contacted Astrid to set up a meeting place once the assassination is completed, and she is on her way. Michael, however, picks up on the tail and deliberately runs into Delaroche, knocking him down and then running for a strand of trees. There, he telephones Elizabeth, who is at home with Max, and gives them specific instructions. As Astrid is pulling up to the Osbourne home, Elizabeth and Max are quickly leaving.

Chapter 44: Michael calls Adrian Carter for transportation, and Astrid follows Elizabeth. In downtown traffic, Max and Elizabeth are able to "lose" her for a bit. Elizabeth exits the car, opening a brief case and inflating a lifestyle dummy "passenger." She then rents a car and heads for the turnpike which will take her to Shelter Island. Astrid has retrieved an angry Delaroche and they continue to follow Max, who is stopped for speeding. Delaroche kills the cop, while Astrid moves to the front of the car, realizing then that the passenger is no more than a mannequin. As he barrels toward her, Astrid fires through the windshield, killing Max.

Chapter 45 finds Michael at CIA headquarters, having heard from Elizabeth that she is indeed safe and on her way to Shelter Island. He is furious with Carter that he has not been given the "October" file earlier, but Carter explains that access to it had been restricted by Monica Tyler. News of the deaths of the policeman and Max is received.

## **Part III: December, Chapters 42-45 Analysis**

It appears that Anne Beckwith is well aware of Elliott's escapades and is an assertive enough woman to protect her husband's name and reputation at the expense of both Vandenberg and Elliott. Further, she reminds Elliott that, should Dayton's article be published, he will most definitely lose his precious defense contract. Essentially, the onus has been placed upon Elliott to take whatever action necessary to prevent the publication, and this means he must go after the Osbourne's, who are on the trail of the documents to provide necessary evidence.

One must wonder why Monica Tyler has restricted access to "October's" file, but given that the reader is now aware of the affair between her and Elliott, it is probable that Elliott has persuaded her to restrict the file so that the Society may use his services when necessary. The conspiracy widens to a dangerous level, moreover, when one considers that the Society, and Elliott specifically, has control over someone in an upper level position within the Central Intelligence Agency.



## Part III: December, Chapters 46-50

### Part III: December, Chapters 46-50 Summary

Delaroche and Astrid retrieve their belongings from their hotel. Though he should now reasonably abort this mission, Delaroche decides otherwise. The money is good, but, more important, is his pride. Failure is unacceptable. Looking again at Osbourne's dossier, he is convinced that they will go to Elizabeth's father's home on Shelter Island. In fact, he is correct. Elizabeth and Michael have re-united and are headed there, Adrian Carter having preceded their arrival in order to set up a host of security measures. Michael knows that October will not succumb to failure, and he will definitely be coming for them. As they arrive, Elliott and the Society Director are discussing the final phase of their operation. When October completes his mission, they will get him out of the country and kill him. One other individual is a loose end, as well, but they will find someone else to handle that murder.

By Chapter 47, Delaroche and Astrid have arrived at North Haven and notice police surveillance at the ferry dock to Shelter Island. Waiting until the ferry services close for the night, Delaroche steals a whaler and heads for the island. The boat ride is treacherous, as he fights wind and rain, but Delaroche's determination wins out and they reach the shoreline, armed with guns, and begin the trek to the house. Killing a security guard, they move toward the gate where a second guard waits in a car. He, too, is killed.

Michael is awakened by the barking dogs, maintained on the property. Attempting to contact the police car, he realizes he is speaking to October and quickly calls Langley, demanding assistance from the local police. At the same time, caretaker Charlie Gibbons has discovered the dead dogs and security guard. He is quickly killed by Astrid.

Carter has been alerted to the situation by the beginning of Chapter 48. Meanwhile, Michael and Elizabeth dress in heavy winter clothing, ready to take the fight into the terrible weather if necessary but counting on the security system to show which door or window has been breached. He takes Elizabeth to the basement and out the exterior door, as Delaroche and Astrid are at the screened porch, picking a lock to enter. Elizabeth is sent to the guest cottage, but is observed by Astrid, who is sent to take her alive. Meanwhile, Michael has cut the power to the entire house, realizing that the security system, with its motion detectors, will continue to operate on battery back-up. Astrid enters the guest cottage, and Elizabeth is in the bedroom, locating the only weapon at her disposal, an old bow and arrow she used long ago. As Astrid enters the bedroom, Elizabeth is able to shoot an arrow into her neck, and Astrid dies.

Michael hears October's footsteps above him. Turning on the intercom, he begins a conversation, calling him Nicolai Mikhailovich, the bastard son of a KGB chief, who was raised by Vladimir and indoctrinated to be a KGB operative in the West. October insists that Astrid has Elizabeth, but a phone call to the cottage confirms that Astrid is dead.





October is losing his focus and runs out of the house to chase after Elizabeth. Michael pursues him and, in the ensuing gun battle, Michael is shot in his right chest, and October's right hand is shattered. With the arrival of the police, October hops onto a dinghy and takes off.

A brief Chapter 49 finds Elliott informing the Director that Michael Osbourne has survived. They conclude that any further attempts to kill him must be scratched. October's whereabouts are unknown, but there is still one target, and the assassination must be skillfully implemented.

Chapter 50: Elliott manages to kill Vandenberg, making it appear to be suicide, complete with a note explaining that the Washington Post would be publishing an article revealing his illegal campaign funding activities on behalf of President Beckwith. He claims full responsibility, stating that neither Beckwith nor Elliott was aware of his behavior. The Post article, in fact, implicates Vandenberg, Elliott, Beckwith and Sam Braxton.

### **Part III: December, Chapters 46-50 Analysis**

The fact that Delaroche is unable to admit defeat is no surprise, for his entire life has focused upon his reputation for success. To allow failure would be to negate his reason for being. He therefore must pursue Michael, no matter what obstacles or dangers present themselves. He is a bit out of his element during this hunt, however, because, always, he has counted on the element of surprise. In this case, Michael knows he is coming and will be prepared for him. When Astrid is killed, Delaroche is no longer the killing machine which allowed his lifelong success. He has allowed emotion to enter his soul, through true feeling for Astrid, and there is no room for emotion in his profession. For this reason, he is ultimately unsuccessful.

Elliott manages to murder the final loose end, but the Washington Post article, even without supporting document evidence, clearly casts an unfavorable light on Vandenberg, Elliott, Braxton, and Beckwith. Unfortunately, the more sinister conspiracy is not uncovered.

## **Part IV: January, Chapters 51**

### **Part IV: January, Chapters 51 Summary**

On Shelter Island, Michael is recuperating from his gunshot wound, reading the daily papers for the "fallout" of Dayton's investigative piece. Beckwith has weathered the storm, thanks largely to his wife's astute move in designing a campaign refinance bill which Beckwith has introduced as his own work. The new law will ban unregulated contributions and force major television stations to provide free campaign ad time equally to all candidates for a national office. Samuel Braxton's tarnished reputation has moved him to withdraw from the nomination for Secretary of State, but he remains managing partner of his law firm. Alatron Defense Systems has withdrawn from the bidding on the missile defense project, following threats of a full Congressional investigation, and the contract is awarded to another firm. The murders of Susanna Dayton, Max Lewis, and the state trooper remain unsolved and are quickly becoming cold cases. Elizabeth is finishing up her current caseload, having resigned from Braxton's firm and will be taking a new position with another New York firm after their twins are born.

As Michael heals, he drafts his report for Adrian Carter, including his belief that Mitchell Elliott and a group of secret "rogue operatives" attacked the airliner in order to obtain the missile defense contract and create further tension in the Middle East. Adrian Carter routes the report to Monica Tyler, who discards it, stating that there is simply no proof of such an outrageous conspiracy.

Carter arrives for a short visit, explaining that the CIA has discovered October's initial "cover" and residence in France. They believe he was probably killed by those who were to assist him flee the U.S., once his work was finished. Michael, however, would like to see a body. He informs Carter, moreover, that he is leaving the service.

### **Part IV: January, Chapters 51 Analysis**

The denouement obviously ties up all loose ends for the "good guys," but the reader is left somewhat dissatisfied that the true culprits remain free and above the law, able to move about and conduct their business as if no criminal activity has occurred. While frustrating, this is perhaps more realistic than if the conspirators were all discovered and punished.



# Epilogue

## Epilogue Summary

An old villa hangs from a cliff top in Mykonos, Greece, looking over the sea. In it resides "October" having purchased it for cash through a bank wire. He spends the winter and spring completing renovations on the old and outdated structure, while his hand heals. By summer, he has learned passable Greek and rides his new bike into the village daily. By May, he begins to paint again, working his injured hand to stretch the scar tissue, producing mostly village and shoreline scenes. In August, he begins the portrait of Astrid, working from existing pencil sketches and, when finished, places it in a prominent place above the fireplace.

## Epilogue Analysis

October has not, in fact, died, as Michael Osbourne suspects. He is obviously retired, however, and will finish his life in relative isolation, perhaps contemplating how his life might have been different. There appears to be little remorse, however, and October is obviously used to being alone with his painting and thoughts.



# Characters

## Michael Osbourne

Growing up in a family in which his father was a CIA operative, Michael Osbourne was not initially interested in a similar career. While in college at Dartmouth, however, he was "spotted" by a CIA recruiter who saw in Michael intelligence, charisma, and the ability to speak several languages. Eventually, Michael agreed to this career, primarily because he had no other employment prospects upon graduation. He became an independent field operative, working primarily in counter-terrorism, under the cover of an international businessman. In London, Michael fell in love with Sarah, a leftist whose politics would probably not please the Agency. Michael therefore kept his relationship secretive, until Sarah was murdered by an assassin whose trademark was three bullets to the face. Believing that his cover had been blown, the Agency re-assigned Michael to a desk job at CIA headquarters at Langley, Virginia, and his position involved tracking terrorist activities throughout the world. He married Elizabeth, daughter of a retired Senator and attorney for a prominent Washington D.C. firm, and they settled into a childless life, focused on their careers. Desiring a child, Elizabeth and Michael decide to undergo in vitro fertilization, which is ultimately successful. An apparent terrorist attack on a commercial airliner grabs Michael's attention, however, when the apparent shooter is murdered by three shots to the face. Michael is convinced that his old nemesis is back in business and begins an international hunt for "October," a man who has been contracted to commit a series of assassinations by an secret society of global political and business leaders. As Michael comes too close to the truth, he is placed on the "hit" list as well and eventually meets "October" face to face, in a personal battle. Michael is injured and manages only to shoot the hand of "October." Ultimately, Michael resigns from the agency, determined to focus on the impending birth of his twins and a more peaceful life.

## Nicolai Mikhailovich

Born the bastard son of a Soviet Union KGB Chief, Nicolai was turned over to a mentor, Vladimir, and trained from childhood to become an assassin. At age 16, he was sent into the West to perform assassinations as instructed by the KGB. With the breakup of the Soviet Union, however, Nicolai was out of work. He became an independent contractor, using a fellow Russian as his "agent." He takes up residence in a small French village, taking the name Jean Delaroche, and operates from this location. He is ultimately contracted by a secret international society to participate in a pseudo terrorist attack on an American airliner, by murdering the young Muslim who shoots the stinger missile at the plane. He is then employed to assassinate four individuals who have knowledge of the truth of the attack, and begins that task, involving as well a female, Astrid Vogel, with whom he has a romantic history. As he moves about the globe to fulfill the terms of the contracts, he is pursued by Michael Osbourne, CIA operative, whose first love was murdered by Delaroche years before. Ultimately, Delaroche and Michael



meet one another, though are unsuccessful in killing one another. Astrid, however, is killed by Elizabeth Osbourne. Delaroche, also known by the code name "October," is injured when Michael shoots his hand, but manages to escape, this time to Greece. He lives a retired life of opulence, having placed money in secret accounts, and pursues his hobby of painting and daily sojourns to the local village. It is clear that "October" is out of the assassination business and will live the remainder of his life privately and quietly.

## **Mitchell Elliott**

Mitchell Elliott is stereotypical of the corporate CEO who has managed to amass a fortune through government defense contracts. As well, he is a complex individual who, with his own brand of religion, believes that there is an elite within society which has the right to be above the law, in the pursuit of its goals. He has thus become an active member of a secret international society which focuses on creating and maintaining tension around the world and lining the pockets of its members. Elliott is the CEO of Alatron Defense Systems, and, as such, has filtered a great deal of money into the presidential campaign of incumbent President Beckwith, because he knows that, through Beckwith's wife and Chief of Staff, he can control policy decisions. He is willing, moreover, to plan and support a pseudo attack on a commercial airliner, in order to promote a missile defense system which his company will build, ensuring billions of dollars of profit. Elliott is the quintessential amoral corporate executive who believes that he can justify any action, so long as his ends are achieved. In the end, because of an investigative journalist, Elliott is somewhat exposed and does not obtain the defense contract for the missile system. He is not completely exposed, however, because his mistress, a CIA supervisor, trashes a report implicating him in a myriad of criminal activities.

## **Sam Braxton**

Managing partner of a prestigious Washington D.C. law firm, Sam Braxton is a political conservative who is willing to violate both ethics and the law in order to further his political ambitions. He has reluctantly employed Elizabeth Osbourne, whom he detests because of her liberal political views, because of pressure from other partners to have the balance of a female and a liberal in the firm. Braxton is a close friend and ally of Mitchell Elliott and has been involved in the illegal funneling of campaign contributions into Beckwith's re-election campaign fund and may, indeed, be fully aware of Elliott's other actions. With Beckwith's re-election, Braxton is nominated for Secretary of State, and it appears that he will be easily confirmed, until investigative reporter Susanna Dayton begins to uncover the conspiratorial nature of the relationships among Braxton, Elliott, and Vandenberg. Once the dead Dayton's piece is published in the Washington Post, Braxton has no choice but to withdraw his nomination and retreat to his law firm once more.



## Paul Vandenberg

Having known President James Beckwith for forty years, Paul Vandenberg is an opportunist who has "managed" Beckwith, his political career and his wife quite well. With Beckwith's election to the Presidency, Vandenberg is now the White House Chief of Staff, and, from this position, is easily able to control policy and action coming from the White House. Vandenberg himself is making the decisions and then "selling" them to a trusting Beckwith, who believes that Vandenberg truly understands the "pulse" of the nation and the world. In fact, Vandenberg is using his position to enrich his friends, one of whom is obviously Mitchell Elliott. He is willing to collude with Elliott in a variety of illegal activities, including campaign financing and illegal surveillance and wiretapping. When Vandenberg comes to realize that Elliott has been a part of the airline bombing and the murder of Susanna Dayton, however, he realizes that he has "sold his soul" for the power of his position, and becomes despondent. He is ultimately murdered by Elliott, a murder that is made to look like suicide, complete with a note confessing that he alone has been responsible for the illegal financing of Beckwith's campaign for a second term.

## Astrid Vogel

Obsessed with the story of her father's anti-Nazi activities, Astrid Vogel, grew up in Switzerland but returned to Germany, convinced that neo-Nazis still ran the country along with American occupiers. She became a leftist terrorist and eventually settled in Amsterdam, working in a book store and living on a houseboat. She is enlisted by Delaroche to join in his assassinations, because two of the targets are womanizers, and she will be able to lure them into his trap. She is a beautiful woman with whom Delaroche obviously has an emotional attachment, and he promises her a retirement together in the Caribbean. When Delaroche takes the contract on Michael Osbourne, he must also use Astrid as a part of the plan. Astrid is killed as she goes after Elizabeth Osbourne. Delaroche immortalizes Astrid in his retirement home in Greece by painting a large portrait of her.

## Elizabeth Osbourne

Daughter of a liberal U.S. Senator and prominent Washington D.C. attorney, Elizabeth is married to Michael Osbourne. She is not thrilled with his occupation but tolerates it because he is, at least, assigned to a desk job at CIA headquarters. More than anything, Elizabeth wishes to begin a family and is undergoing in vitro fertilization toward that end. The procedure is not attended Michael, as he is off in Europe chasing his old nemesis, who killed his first love, Sarah. Elizabeth is certainly concerned that Michael has never recovered from Sarah's death but remains steadfast in her love for him. Elizabeth is drawn into the plot of conspiracy and treachery through her job, working for Sam Braxton and through her friendship with Washington Post reporter, Susanna Dayton. Braxton is funneling campaign money illegally for Mitchell Elliott, and Susanna Dayton is investigating the relationship among Braxton, Elliott, and Paul



Vandenberg. Elizabeth is forced to kill Astrid Vogel, but this trauma is offset by a healthy pregnancy with twins and Michael's ultimate resignation from the CIA.

## **Susanna Dayton**

An investigative reporter for the Washington Post, Susanna is a friend of Elizabeth Osbourne, having been a fellow classmate in law school. Susanna is investigating collusion among Elizabeth's boss, Sam Braxton, and two other powerful individuals, private businessman and defense contractor Mitchell Elliott and Paul Vandenberg, White House Chief of Staff. As Susanna got too close to the truth, Elliott had her home bugged and her movements followed. Ultimately, Susanna is murdered as an unintended consequence of one of Elliott's goons trying to steal her disks and documents.

## **James Beckwith**

President Beckwith has just been re-elected for his second term in office as the novel begins. He has not been an enthusiastic candidate but is so controlled by Paul Vandenberg and Mitchell Elliott that he allows himself to be "sold" on policies and actions that line the pockets of greedy corporate executives and promote criminal activity throughout the world. He is a weak leader, preferring to abdicate authority to those only too willing to take control.

## **Anne Beckwith**

Wife of President Beckwith, Anne is a rather selfish greedy individual herself. Originally objecting to her husband's run for re-election, she is persuaded by Mitchell Elliott to convince her husband to run anyway. In return, Elliott uses Sam Braxton to put together real estate deals to enrich the Beckwith's, so that they may retire in style.

## **Adrian Carter**

Friend and immediate supervisor of Michael Osbourne, Adrian Carter is both sympathetic to Osbourne's need to pursue "October" and yet curbed in his support somewhat by his boss, Monica Tyler. In the end, he secrets "October's" confidential file to Michael, when Monica places Michael on leave.

## **Monica Tyler**

Director of the CIA counter-terrorism unit at Langley, Monica Tyler is Michael Osbourne's ultimate boss. She has not been particularly pleased with Michael in general but is furious when he refuses to return from his search for "October" when directed to do so. She places Michael on administrative leave as a consequence. Once the reader

discovers that she is involved in an affair with Mitchell Elliott, one must wonder how involved she is in the activities of both Elliott and the Society. She emerges unscathed in the end, leaving the reader a bit disappointed.





## Objects/Places

### Sword of Gaza

A small radical Islamic organization initially blamed for the stinger attack on an American commercial airline

### stinger

A ground-to-air missile used to bring down an an American passenger jet in New York Harbor

### Kalorama

Upscale neighborhood in the Washington D.C. area

### KGB

Former Soviet Union intelligence organization

### Shelter Island

small island off the coast of New York and the home of former Senator Douglas Cannon, father of Elizabeth Osbourne

### The Society

A secret international organization focused on maintaining tension and conflict in the world for the purpose of financial gain of its members

### Dover

town on the coast of England and site of a large ferry service that crosses the English Channel to Calais, France

### Mulchabarat

Egyptian security service



## **Langley, Virginia**

headquarters of the CIA

## **jib**

An inflatable figure which can be placed in a window or car to feign the presence of a person

## **Mykonos, Greece**

Small village in which the assassin "October" retires after failing to kill Michael Osbourne



# Themes

## Power, Corruption, and Greed

The famous saying, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," is certainly applicable to this novel and can be seen as a universal theme dating back to early Greek tragedy. The third component is greed, for those who corrupt themselves are most often focused on money and the power that it wields. Though Silva's novel was published in 1998, its universal message for contemporary America is quite clear as well. Individuals and/or groups of individuals are willing to corrupt any political or economic system for their personal gain. Mitchell Elliott is the epitome of corruption, as he is willing to murder, manipulate, and cause the death of innocent airline passengers, in order to achieve both the goals of the secret society to which he belongs, as well as his personal aims of enrichment, through the development of a missile defense system at taxpayer expense. He has managed to control the President through his manipulation of both wife Anne Beckwith and Paul Vandenberg, the White House Chief of Staff.

Vandenberg has willingly corrupted himself, though he is unaware of the extent of that corruption until he realizes how far Elliott has been willing to achieve his ends. Ultimately, Elliott must murder Vandenberg as well, in order not to be discovered. Sam Braxton, Elliott's attorney, has sacrificed the ethics and principles of his profession, by structuring investments to enrich the Beckwith's and by funneling secret campaign contributions toward Beckwith's re-election. In return, he expects to become the next Secretary of State, a position offering significant prestige and power. He, too, is a pawn of Elliott, but is too focused upon his own promotion to understand the full impact of his choices.

Mitchell Elliott has set himself above the law of man, perhaps truly believing that his purpose comes from God and that his activities, which violate the laws of his country, can be justified by his conviction that he is somehow part of God's chosen elite, a position which "authorizes" all that he does, as long as it is done in the name of his God.

## Conspiracy

Central to the plot of this work is the concept of a multinational group of wealthy and powerful individuals whose activities serve to control the relationships among the world's countries. The "Society" has as its purpose the promotion of tensions among countries and the creation of international crises, so that it may control the actions of national leaders and enrich its members. Relative to the United States, for example, it planned and implemented an airline bombing, so that a presidential election would be influenced and a man elected who could then be indirectly controlled by member Mitchell Elliott.



On another level, there is the conspiracy among Mitchell and several other important figures. He conspires with Anne Beckwith to influence her husband to seek a second term of office; he conspires with Paul Vandenberg, in order to control the decisions made by President Beckwith once he is in office; he conspires with Sam Braxton, in order to enrich the Beckwith's and to illegally funnel funds into Beckwith's campaign coffers; and he conspires with Monica Tyler to prevent full investigations of the findings of Susanna Dayton and Michael Osbourne.

Conspiracy theories are popular among fiction writers, perhaps because they are so popular among many segments of our society. Every presidential assassination from Lincoln forward, for example, has resulted in a number of conspiracy theories, positing that groups of powerful, secretive individuals have planned them. News media figures and contemporary non-fiction authors, moreover, promote the ideas of conspiracies among oil, automobile manufacturers, and politicians. Many blame the Wall Street "meltdown" of 2008 upon a loose conspiracy among large financial institutions and the politicians they have controlled, who dismantled government regulations that would have curbed their activities. Indeed, whenever two or more individuals plan and implement tasks that have the goal of control over segments of a society, be they political, economic, or social, one could certainly surmise that a conspiracy exists.

## Money and politics

Many Americans believe that the greatest threat to American democracy is the dependence of candidates upon substantial financial backing in order to run their campaigns and the resultant pervasive influence that large donors have over those they have assisted in winning elections. Author Silva demonstrates this atmosphere to the extreme through the election of President Beckwith. Powerful and sometimes foreign individuals are funneling money into his campaign, in order that he be elected and then controlled by Vandenberg and Mitchell Elliott. It is unlikely that Beckwith was even aware, in many instances, of the sources of money being surreptitiously funneled into his campaign coffers, but his closest advisors, in accepting the money, became clearly beholden to the financial backers and their views of the world. As stated, this example is an extreme one; however, in the world of politics, it has become more and more costly to run for political office, and elected officials must continually seek funding for future elections while they are serving current terms in office. It is therefore realistic to surmise that, in order to obtain the funds needed, office-holders will introduce legislation or policies which favor their donors and oppose legislation or policies which might cause harm to these same benefactors. Unfortunately, then, politicians do not truly represent those who have elected them to office but, rather, serve those who fund them. Silva seems to present a case for campaign finance reform but, as well, seems to say that, in the end, shrewd individuals and corporations will always find methods to bypass regulations, and in so doing continue to threaten our democratic ideals.



# Style

## Point of View

Author Silva presents his tale with a third person, total omniscient point of view. This approach is essential to the plot, because, only in this manner, can the reader understand the intricacies of the conspiracy networks and the personal philosophies of those involved in such conspiracies. If one were only to read of Mitchell Elliott's activities, for example, it would be difficult to understand his motivations. His thoughts, however, allow the reader to understand the personal philosophy of an individual whose religious beliefs include the God-given right of certain individuals to place themselves above man-made law and to group together as an elite force, able to commit heinous acts and crimes and to enrich themselves in the process. The thoughts of "October" provide insight into his early years and development, and his training and "brainwashing" by his handler Vladimir, so that he became the killing machine he is. The deductive thinking processes of Michael Osbourne, as well as his reflections upon his past, allow the reader to fit the pieces of the puzzle of multiple, seemingly unrelated crimes and assassinations into a unified conspiracy by a secret society whose goal is control of all international relationships. The novel is full of complex characters, whose psychological make-ups and personal goals are often more revealed through their thoughts rather than their actions.

## Setting

Though the primary setting of this work is in the Washington, D.C. area, obviously because so many of the major characters reside and work there, many important events and activities occur throughout the world. Delaroche lives in France, travels to Amsterdam to enlist Astrid Vogel, and then, together, they travel to France, England, Cairo, Canada and the U.S., in their pursuit of assassination targets. Michel Osbourne travels to Europe as well, on the trail of Delaroche and his targets, traveling to London, Rome and Cairo. Because the essentials of the plot involve the CIA, many events and activities occur at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Specific landmarks in each of the locations, moreover, lend solid credibility to the plot and provide the reader with accurate and important geographical information. Equally important to the plot is the time frame of contemporary technology, portrayed by such things as stinger missiles, the ability to observe actual air strikes against the Sword of Gaza training sites, via satellite, and the use of high-tech bugging and listening devices. Accurate descriptions of world conditions and international relationships provide the reader with contemporary issues, such as the loss of power with the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Arab-Israeli conflict, terrorism, intelligence networks, corporate and individual greed and lust for power, and campaign financing, or the role that money plays in politics, all issues that are as real today as they were when the novel was written in 1998.



## Language and Meaning

Credibility for characters in any novel depends upon the author's ability to produce descriptions, actions, thoughts, and conversations which maintain the portrait of those characters and promote them as believable in the eyes of the reader. In this respect, Silva obviously did his homework. Each individual, whether a political figure, a zealot, a cold, calculating egotist, or a professional, must use language appropriate for that station and personality. Because many characters are involved in intelligence, there is a great deal of terminology appropriate for that profession. Michael, for example, speaks of "handlers," or individuals who act as caretakers for field operatives, providing directives and cover when necessary. Terms such as "counter-terrorism unit" are typical of CIA departments; illegal funneling of campaign funds in order to provide candidates with an advantage is typical of individuals such as Mitchell Elliott and Samuel Braxton. The language of each character is carefully crafted to meet the personality and socio-economic status of that individual. Further, each is given the appropriate amount and type of knowledge of history and politics required for his or her particular profession. The reader must have a cursory understanding of some events and terms, moreover, in order to completely understand the complexities of the powers and forces at work. The breakup of the Soviet Union, for example, is responsible for "October's" independent contractor status; The KGB and Mossad are terms for a former and current intelligence service. As a whole, the language is not academic and difficult but, rather, a factor in the credibility of characterization.

## Structure

The novel is divided into four parts, each covering a month from October through January. While it is clearly chronological, beginning with a stinger missile attack on an American commercial airliner and ending with a climactic confrontation between Michael Osbourne and an old nemesis, "October," there is a continual movement back to past events, in order to allow reader understanding of the current situation and perspective of each major character. Part I, October, begins with the missile attack and the belief of Michael Osbourne that the murder of the perpetrator is the work of an assassin with whom he has an intimate past. Further, Michael deduces that the Sword of Gaza is not responsible for the attack, despite evidence to the contrary. The reader is also introduced to the Society and a few members who have contributed to the attack and ensuing assassination, in order to control world events and a presidential election in the United States. Part II, November, introduces Jean Paul Delaroche and his new contracts to assassinate non-Society individuals who have knowledge of the true nature of the attack. It continues with Susanna Dayton's investigative activity into the relationships among Vandenberg, Elliott and Sam Braxton, as well as Michael's determination to pursue the truth about the attack and the identity of assassin "October." Part III, November, focuses on October's travels to London and Cairo, in order to fulfill the terms of his assassination contracts and Michael's continued pursuit of him. Part IV, December, focuses on the plans and activities of October as he attempts to fulfill his final contract, the assassination of Michael Osbourne, who is coming too close to the



truth. A short Part IV, January, includes the climax and involves October's first failed attempt to murder Michael, Michael's preparation for October's second attempt and the ultimate confrontation, during which Astrid is killed and October escapes. The denouement provides incomplete satisfaction for the reader, as Vandenberg is killed, Elliott loses the defense contract but remains free of any criminal prosecution, and Sam Braxton withdraws his name from nomination to a cabinet post. The criminal activities remain unresolved, as Michael retires from the CIA and October retires into obscurity on a Greek island.



## Quotes

"Vandenberg liked what he saw. The downing of Flight 002 dominated the front pages of every major newspaper in the country. The presidential campaign seemed no longer to exist." (Chapter 9, p. 86)

"Most of the predecessors had believed it was their job to help the President arrive at decisions by making certain he saw the right people and read the right information. Vandenberg saw his job differently: He made the decisions and sold them to the President." (Chapter 9, p. 87)

:One image remained long after she arrived home, as she lay in bed awake, waiting for Michael. It was the image of Mitchell Elliott and Samuel Braxton, huddled together like a pair of giggling schoolboys in the darkened garden, toasting each other with champagne." (Chapter 9, p. 110)

"He played politics with Flight Double-oh-two all the way, and the American people were too bored and too distracted to notice. I supported him on the retaliation, but as for the missile defense system, I think that's payback to a lot of old friends who've backed him over the years." (Chapter 11, p. 125 - spoke by Senator Cannon)

"Michael hesitated before uttering his next words. Finally, he said, 'What if I were to tell you that I don't think the Sword of Gaza shot down that airliner?'"(Chapter 11, p. 127)

"To those who knew of the group's existence it was known simply as the Society. Despite its name, the Society was not interested in making the world a more peaceful place. Its membership included rogue intelligence officers, politicians, arms merchants, mercenaries, drug lords, international crime organizations, and powerful business moguls." (Chapter 12, pp. 129-30)

"He had not actually fired the missile, but he had been a key player in the operation. His job was to get the Palestinian in place, kill hm when it was done, and scuttle the motor yacht before being extracted by helicopter at sea. He had carried out his assignment perfectly, and for that he was rewarded with one million dollars." (Chapter. 13, p. 141)

"Delaroche protected his identity with a care bordering in paranoia. Most men in his line of work dealt with the problem by having plastic surgeons give them a new face every few years. Delaroche dealt with it another way - he rarely permitted anyone who knew what he really did to see his face." (Chapter 13, p. 144)

"Delaroche had always been dispassionate about killing, but for the first time in longer than he could remember he felt an excitement rising within him. It was not unlike the feeling he had when he was sixteen, the night he killed for the first time." (Chapter 17, p. 176)





"The European Community makes the life of the international terrorist much easier because, once inside a member nation, travel to the others is almost free of risk. Delaroche and Astrid entered the United Kingdom on Dutch passports, posing as unmarried tourists, enduring only a cursory inspection of their travel documents by a bored British official." (Chapter 19, p. 198)

"Go back to your wife and forget about Sarah Randolph. She wasn't real. And whatever you do, keep your wits about,' he added, mouth close to Michael's ear. 'If you go after October and you make a single mistake, he will kill you so quickly you'll never know what hit you.'" (Chapter 21, p. 232 - Drozdov to Michael)

"Vandenberg glanced up at the Lincoln Memorial. He thought, My God, what have I done?" (Chapter 25, pp. 268-69)

"She had been a lie, a myth created by his enemies, tragically heroic in her boundless naivete. She had betrayed him, but she was not real. He could not love her, nor could he hate her. He only felt sorry for her." (Chapter 28, pp. 295-96)

"The Director believed spies and intelligence services were rather like rats and cockroaches. Better to keep up the pretense they don't really exist. Helps a free society sleep better at night."(Chapter 29, p. 299) "...Elliott needed help to devise all these schemes. He had big plans for Beckwith, and he didn't want him tarnished by scandal. He needed someone who understood Washington and, more importantly, understood how to circumvent campaign finance laws. He turned to a high-powered Washington lawyer." (Chapter 40, pp. 367-68)

"Elliott poured down the rest of his scotch. He didn't appreciate being lectured by Anne Beckwith. If it hadn't been for Anne's greed and Anne's insecurities, Elliott would never have been able to establish his special financial relationship with her husband. Anne always called the shots, even when it came to graft." (Chapter 42, p. 380)

"Delaroche wanted to continue, though, for two reasons. One was money. If he failed to kill Osbourne he would forfeit three quarters of a million dollars." (Chapter 46, p. 407)

"The second reason - indeed, the important reason - was pride. Osbourne had beaten him on the footpath along the river, outsmarted Delaroche at his own game. He had never blown an assignment, and he didn't want to end his career with a failure." (Chapter 46, p. 407)

"The arrowhead struck Astrid in the base of her throat and drove her back, pinning her to the open door. Elizabeth screamed. Astrid's eyes opened wide and her lips parted." (Chapter 48, p. 432)

"Some nights Delaroche had a dream, and the dream played out in his imagination now. The men he had killed would confront him, armed with silenced automatics, and he would reach for his Glock pistol or his Beretta and find only paint brushes." (Chapter 48, p. 437)



"It was a large work, about six feet by four feet. The woman wore only a white blouse, unbuttoned to her navel, tinged with the raw sienna of the setting sun. Her long body was draped over a small wooden chair, facing backward. One hand rested beneath her chin; the other held something that looked like a gun, though no one would put a gun in the hand of a woman so beautiful.....not even a recluse Frenchman." (Epilogue, p. 462)



## Topics for Discussion

In 20th and 21st century America, there have been a number of events that have spawned conspiracy theories. Identify and discuss one of these.

Campaign financing has been a controversial matter for years. A recent Supreme Court decision has approved unlimited corporate contributions to political candidates, in the name of "Freedom of Speech." Discuss the implications of this decision on potential policy decisions and legislation of elected officials.

Corporate greed was a factor in the 2008 Wall Street meltdown and resultant taxpayer financial bailout of large banking institutions. What role should government play in regulating these institutions?

One of Mitchell Elliott's main goals is to obtain a defense contract for the construction of a missile defense shield, a contract which will make him billions of dollars. How are such government contracts normally obtained? Do you believe that certain corporations have advantages over others in the attainment of such contracts? If so, how do they obtain these advantages?

Intelligence gathering and covert operations are normal activities of all industrialized nations' governments. It is reasonable to assume that, within the covert operations segment of intelligence organizations, there are plans for the assassinations of "undesirable" or "dangerous" individuals. Can the assassination of a national leader of one country by another nation's leadership ever be justified? If not, why? If so, under what circumstances?

In keeping with the adage, "Power corrupts," discuss how power corrupted individuals within this novel. Identify at least two individuals and give specific details of their corruption as a result of power.

The themes of this novel involve power, greed, corruption, conspiracy, and the use of money to control. Take one of these themes and develop it, using examples from contemporary political and/or economic issues in America.