

# **The Revenger**

**Book 8 in the Dan Stone series**

**A Novel**

**By**  
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# Chapter 1

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It was an early spring day in Washington, D.C., one of those days that offer a prelude to the full delights of spring. The cherry blossoms were nearing the end of their blooming, drawing a large influx of people to view their glorious array. Now the pathways around the tidal basin were strewn with an ever-deepening pink carpet. Late arrivers still walked the grounds around the reflecting pool and along the borders of the monuments to wonder at the dense collection of trees that produced such a delight. The air was sweet and fresh, even in the city. The sun shone brightly, and the world looked somehow more pure and more innocent. People smiled at one another, and you felt a sense of optimism in the air. Spring was here. The weather was beautiful. The world was good.

Baruch Mier was a member of Israel's team of negotiators involved in the Abraham Peace Accords, so named because the Abraham of the Bible is considered a common ancestor of both Jews and Muslims and revered as a prophet by both religions. He was working with a senior State Department diplomat named Jonathan Bishop. The two were planning their next steps to bring the Saudis on board. They had shown increased interest in recent months as Iran progressed further in its attempts to dominate the region. The war in Yemen, a lightly disguised proxy war between the two countries, was at a stalemate. Weeks ago, arms heading to the Houthi rebels from Iran were intercepted, but the intelligence indicated many had gotten through. The re-arming would bring about renewed fighting. Increasingly, many Middle East countries were looking at the accords as a way to hedge in Iran, whose sworn enemies were Israel and the U.S.

Bishop led the efforts to capitalize on this development and finally bring the Saudis to the table. With them on board, the agreement would be more substantial, and the other wavering Mideast states would re-examine their reluctance.

On that day, full of the promise of spring, Mier and Bishop met for lunch at Blackfinn, a restaurant on I Street near 16th. It was not far from Farragut Square. The restaurant had a high-end pub feel and offered a wide selection of *entrees* that would please a variety of tastes. It featured outdoor seating, perfect for this early but warm spring day.

The two men took advantage of the mild day and were seated outside near the curb. They had just ordered and were relaxing with glasses of white wine. The sidewalk was filled with pedestrians as it was lunch hour, and the weather was inviting.

“We are going to change the world, Jonathan,” Baruch said as he raised his glass in a toast.

“Maybe. The time is certainly ripe for the next step.” Jonathan saluted his counterpart with his glass. “You think the Saudis are finally giving up their antagonism towards Israel?”

Baruch shook his head. “I only wish. They are the keepers of the faith, remember. They walk a tightrope—”

“The royal family.”

“Yes. They must protect the center of Islam while pushing back against the Iranians. It is this Shia-Sunni split that we exploit at the moment. If they can still be seen as the protectors of Islam while befriending Israel, we will prevail. We must set the path, so that the economic benefits can start to flow. The Saudis are a practical people, after all. The oil won’t last forever and alternate energy sources are forcing them to think beyond their oil dominance.”

“They put Iran more into a corner while moving their economy forward.”

Baruch nodded. “But the clerics have to be placated. The royals must allow them to enforce their strict rules on the populace, while not going so far as to cause a rebellion.”

“They walk a tightrope, as you say.”

Jonathan thought for a moment.

“To stretch that analogy further, we must help stabilize the rope, so they don’t slip and fall.”

Baruch smiled. “You’re reaching the limits of the analogy, but I don’t disagree.”

“Do you think a rebellion is possible?”

Baruch shook his head. “Probably not in my lifetime. Still, you never know what the future will bring. There is so much imported labor in the country. They can’t do without it. These people have no rights and could be a volatile segment if they ever got fed up.”

“Or organized.”

At that moment, a van drove up to the curb. The two men glanced at it since it stopped in front of a fire hydrant. Expensive cars often drove up to dislodge passengers to the restaurant, but not a plain, commercial-type van. Those went around back to an alley to unload supplies for businesses. The driver got out and quickly walked across the street.

“He’s going to get a ticket,” Baruch remarked.

They watched the man get into a car that had pulled up and then drive off.

“Something’s up,” Jonathan said, rising from his chair.

Baruch gave him a questioning look. A question he never got to ask. The explosion ripped the van apart. All the eardrums of the patrons sitting at the sidewalk tables burst just as the shrapnel tore through their bodies, shredding them into body parts. The blast continued through the front windows into the restaurant, killing more. Staff in the kitchen were spared death but were injured by flying debris. Fire broke out and began to spread inside. The adjacent buildings suffered damage, with broken windows and metal shards tearing through the ground floors. Across the street, the façade of the glass-fronted building shattered. The crowded sidewalk instantly turned into a debris and body-laden battleground. Anyone in the way was either injured or killed. It was the luck of the draw as to where the metal ripped through them.

The beauty and hope of the fresh spring day were blown apart that noon. The tourists strolling along the Mall heard the blast as a muffled whoomp accompanied by a slight pressure wave. Shortly the wail of many sirens pierced the air. They understood. Despite the beauty of the day, D.C. was a dangerous city, and like all such cities, bad things happened; people got robbed, beaten, or worse.

Within minutes the rising notes of the sirens multiplied as the fire trucks raced to the scene. Once there, they unloaded their hoses and ran through the human debris to quench the growing fire inside the building. The injured were helped to safety and to the numerous ambulances arriving. Once the fire was under control, the true horror of what had taken place showed its face. The police arrived and tried to set up a perimeter. The firefighters were intent on ensuring the fire was out, but their activities seemed to be contaminating the crime scene with all its bodies and body parts strewn about the sidewalk.

Finally, the fire department retreated and turned the scene over to the police, with a fire investigator assigned to work with them. An hour later, the FBI showed up, and the three agencies began coordinating their work to pick over the ruins and piece together what had

happened. By the end of the day, they understood that a van had driven up, parked, and exploded. They could find no body parts in the van, so they assumed the driver had fled the scene. There were no witnesses to testify; everyone who had been close to the truck was dead.