

ROGUE MISSION

A NEW JORDAN SANDOR THRILLER

FROM BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**JEFFREY S.
STEPHENS**

A POST HILL PRESS BOOK

ISBN (Hardcover): 978-1-61868-813-2

ISBN (eBook): 978-1-61868-812-5

ROGUE MISSION

A Jordan Sandor Thriller

© 2016 by Jeffrey S. Stephens

All Rights Reserved

Cover Design by Dean Samed, Conzpiracy Digital Arts

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means without the written permission of the author and publisher.



Post Hill

PRESS

Post Hill Press

275 Madison Avenue, 14th Floor

New York, NY 10016

posthillpress.com

with sincere appreciation to Larry Garinger

PROLOGUE

Hartford, Connecticut

By the time darkness fell over the blunt silhouette of the federal courthouse in Hartford, the building was all but abandoned. Now, one by one, the men and women who worked the janitorial night shift were arriving.

The cleaning crew was well known to the two federal officers manning the front door. The marshals would glimpse at the familiar I.D.'s, check handbags and backpacks, send the workers through the metal detector and off to their assigned areas.

Inside, long corridors led to courtrooms, judges' chambers and a labyrinth of other offices. There were floors to be mopped and waxed, wastebaskets to be emptied, desks and cabinets to be dusted, and other chores to be performed, a monotonous routine that was followed night after night as the building was prepared for the next day's business.

“Evenin’ Dorothy,” one of the U.S. Marshals greeted a middle-aged black woman as she placed her handbag on the conveyor belt that passed through the x-ray machine. “How you feeling?”

“Old and tired,” she said with a short laugh.

“You and me both,” he replied.

She stepped through the scanner, picked up her purse, and slowly headed down the hallway.

The next worker to come through the front door was a stranger to both marshals. He looked to be in his early thirties, a light-skinned African American, about six feet tall, well built, with a shaved head and a friendly face. No one had seen him standing across the street for the past twenty minutes, waiting in the shadows until Dorothy got there.

“Can I help you?” the senior guard asked him.

The man reached into his pocket and produced a piece of paper together with an identity card. “Preston came down with some sort of bug,” he explained as he handed over the documents. “They called me in at the last minute.”

The marshal checked the work order, then read his name off the plastic card. “David Prince.”

“It’s pronounced Daveed,” the young man corrected him.

The marshal nodded. “Never seen you here before.”

David Prince shrugged. “Been here a couple of times. I know my way around.”

The Marshal called out to Dorothy and asked her to come back. “Just the same,” he said, turning back to David, “Dorothy’ll show you where to go. You’re working for Preston, she’s the one to let you know what you’ve gotta do.”

David nodded. “That’ll be great.”

They had him empty his pockets, which contained nothing but a wallet, key ring and some chewing gum, then had him remove his belt. After David passed through the metal detector, the marshal

handed everything back, along with his identity card, but held onto the work order.

By now Dorothy had returned to the security desk. The marshal told her, "This is David Prince, filling in for Preston. You show him where to go and what to do."

Dorothy gave David a once over and sighed, as if to say this was just one more thing she didn't want to be bothered with.

"We got a big day here tomorrow," the guard reminded her with a smile.

"Don't I know it," Dorothy replied. Then she turned to David. "Come on, young fella. Preston does my heavy lifting, you get that honor tonight."

As they walked off, members of the night shift continued to show up and make their way to other sections of the building.



A few hours later, after completing their assignments on the third floor and most of the second, Dorothy led David toward one of the larger courtrooms.

"They're having a ceremony in there tomorrow morning," she said.

The young man nodded, then politely volunteered to do whatever was needed to get it into shape.

"Got to have everything spic 'n span," she told him.

When they entered the large courtroom, David took a quick glance around.

"Looks pretty clean already."

Dorothy shook her head and fixed him with a disapproving stare.

David responded with a smile. "I'll go get the mop and pail."

"You know where the utility room is on this floor?"

“Sure do,” he told her, then headed down the hall and found the supply closet. He entered the small space, switched on the light and pulled the door closed behind him.

Attaching a hose to the faucet, he began to fill the large bucket that sat on wheels beside the sink. Then he moved aside some boxes on the metal shelves to the right until he found what he was looking for.

Two days before, there had been a scheduled delivery of cleaning fluids and compounds. Secreted within those boxes were the deadly materials he was seeking: plastic explosives that had been molded so they could be hidden inside a drum of floor wax; two bottles disguised as glass cleaner, each containing a different colorless liquid which, when combined, formed a highly flammable explosive; and timing devices, more difficult to conceal, that had been taken apart, their pieces stowed amidst the packing materials and inside the handles of two new brushes.

David carefully placed the two clear bottles inside the large bucket, where they all but disappeared from view under the water. He placed the packets of C-4 explosives in the roomy back pockets of his overalls. Then he began assembling the detonators.

He was concentrating on the components of these timing devices, with the water still running, so he did not hear the door open behind him.

“What’s taking you so . . . ,” Dorothy began, but then stopped as she watched him at work on the small counter. “What the hell are those?”

David’s plan was to convince the old lady to leave him in the courtroom, promising her that he would scrub the floors until they shined. He had no interest in killing her, since that would just create an unneeded complication. Just ten minutes alone was all he needed to accomplish what he had come there to do. After that he would finish the shift with her and they could walk out of the building together.

That was no longer an option.

When he turned to face her, the look in his eyes instantly told her all she needed to know. She made a move to back away and began to cry out, but he was too fast and too strong. He leapt at her with feline quickness, giving her shoulders a violent twist so he could grab her throat from behind, his muscular arm immediately beginning to choke the breath out of her.

Dorothy responded on instinct, the absolute wrong countermeasure. Instead of reaching back and trying to claw at his eyes, or punching down towards his groin, or even stamping her heel onto his foot, she reflexively reached up with both hands in an attempt to free herself from his grasp.

She had no chance against his brute strength.

David increased the pressure, his forearm so tight against her throat she could neither breathe nor scream. The more she struggled the sooner she ran out of oxygen. When her arms finally fell to her sides and her body went limp, he held on for another few seconds, then gave her head a powerful twist and snapped her neck.

Certain she was dead, he let go, her corpse sliding from his grip onto the floor.

“Damn,” he snarled aloud, faced with two unexpected problems.

First, he had to find a place to hide her. Second, when he exited the building he would need a plausible explanation why he and Dorothy were not leaving together. He could not afford to arouse suspicion.

He shook his head. He would worry about his departure later. Right now he had to attend to the issue at hand—finding a place for her body. He turned off the water and threw a large rag over the detonators. He leaned down, took Dorothy under the arms, jerked her up and slung her over his right shoulder like a large sack of potatoes. Then he carried her across the hall.

The judicial ceremony would be in full swing by eleven the next morning. Wherever he put her, David had to be sure her corpse

was not discovered before then. Using the passkey hanging from Dorothy's apron, he entered the warren of offices opposite the courtroom entrance.

He moved swiftly, even under the weight of Dorothy's inert form. He knew the other members of the cleaning crew were unlikely to venture into this part of the building, but there was always the chance one of the marshals might decide to come by on patrol, especially since they had never seen him before. He had to act fast.

He looked behind various large desks and tall cabinets, then spotted a storage closet toward the rear of the file rooms. He opened it and found dozens of dusty old boxes piled high, not a place that was likely to be visited any time soon. Dropping her body to the floor, he moved a stack of cartons out of the way, making enough room to lay Dorothy down. He then dragged her behind the cartons, replaced them, and had a look at his handiwork.

She was not visible, not unless someone stepped inside and moved the boxes aside. He pulled a rag from his pocket and wiped at the footprints he had made in the dust. Then he stood again and nodded to himself. It was the best he could do, so he shut the door and hurried out to the corridor and back inside the utility closet—this time locking himself in. If someone else was going to come looking for him this time, at least he would hear the key in the door.

He finished putting together the timing devices, gathered up a few other items that had been included in the lethal shipment, shoved them in his pockets, and opened the door. Mop in hand he wheeled the pail toward the courtroom.

Not making the same mistake twice, he locked himself inside, standing at the counsel tables in the middle of the spacious, high-ceilinged room, David pulled the two glass jars from the bucket of water, wiped them off and set them down. One contained polystyrene, the other benzene. Combined, they formed what is commonly known as napalm 2, a highly combustible substance that not only does tremendous damage to buildings and property but,

when ignited, will cover its victims in a thick, fiery hail that clings and burns and kills.

He expertly blended the lethal mixture in three equal amounts, then poured the fluid into three clear plastic bags. Putting those carefully aside, he went about setting the timers on the triggering devices and connected each of those to a portion of the C4 *plastique*. That done, he placed each of the three armed detonators, together with the bags of fluid, into a second, thicker plastic bag, to help defeat any last-minute sweep by bomb sniffing dogs, although any such precaution would be highly unusual.

Americans are absurdly confident that their courthouses are safe places, he noted with contempt.

Next, he pulled out several adhesive strips that had also been left for him in the utility closet, and secured the three devices in the locations he had already chosen throughout the room.

He affixed the first beneath the judge's desk, all the way in the back, behind the drawer. He taped the second beneath one of the counsel tables, in the middle of the room. He hid the third under the front row of benches, in the area where spectators would sit.

Having a look around, David was satisfied everything was in order and no traces of his handiwork remained in evidence. He unlocked the door to the courtroom and went about the business of mopping the floor.

That was when he heard someone come in behind him.

"How you doin', young fella?"

David spun around and found himself facing the senior guard. "I'm good," he said.

The guard nodded, then asked, "Where's Dorothy? Didn't see her in the hallway."

David did his best to appear embarrassed. "You didn't see her leave?"

"She left?"

The young man shrugged. “She wasn’t feeling all that well. We had most everything done, I told her I would finish up here.” He grinned. “Had the sense she might try and slip out, maybe trying not to get docked.”

The marshal looked more puzzled than upset. “That’s not like Dorothy.”

“Don’t know what to tell you,” David said. He was standing with the mop in hand, water dripping around his boots. “All right if I keep at this?”

“Sure, sure,” the marshal replied. “How long ago did she leave?”

David was back to mopping, and didn’t look up as he said, “Not that long.”

The marshal turned and left the room, leaving David to do just as he had promised Dorothy—the floor would shine for the dignitaries who would be arriving in just a few hours.

PART ONE

CHAPTER 1

Hartford, Connecticut

Dressed in a navy blue suit, white shirt and red tie, Jordan Sandor left his brownstone apartment on West 76th Street in Manhattan, climbed into his weathered but reliable Land Rover, and headed to Hartford.

Sandor did not typically attend this sort of event for at least three reasons. First, in the world of clandestine operations he inhabited, anonymity was a priceless asset. Second, Sandor harbored a general distrust of authority and all its trappings. Third, he just hated the damn things because they were always boring and inevitably ran too long.

But today was different. Today was about Jim O'Hara, the man who served as Sandor's commanding officer in Iraq and who became

JEFFREY S. STEPHENS

so much more to him than that. O'Hara was being honored for his promotion from federal trial judge in Connecticut to the Court of Appeals in Manhattan, and Sandor was not going to miss it.

Unfortunately, by the time Sandor reached I-91 the morning rush hour was a brutal mess, and he cursed himself for not leaving earlier. He began weaving in and out of the slow moving traffic, doing all he could to arrive in time for the formal part of the proceedings. When he finally reached the Main Street exit, he knew it was going to be close. As he worried over his lousy timing, his cell phone rang.

"Sandor," he said, keeping his eyes on the road.

"Where the hell are you?" the familiar voice barked.

"Nearly there, sir," he told O'Hara. "Got tangled up a bit on the highway."

"Damnit son, haven't I taught you to prepare for every possible contingency in life? Didn't you have enough sense to realize there'd be rush hour traffic this time of the day?"

"Sorry sir, pulling into a parking lot right now."

"We've got judges, lawyers, even congressmen here. They all managed to arrive on time."

Sandor pulled his Rover to a stop in the first space he saw, ignored the parking meter as he jumped out and, with the phone to his ear, began running toward the building, "Almost at the front door," he reported as he raced across the empty plaza.

O'Hara began chuckling softly into the phone. "They're telling me they want to get this clambake fired up, but I didn't want to start without you. Had to be sure you were on your way."

"Almost there, just across the street now."

"All right," O'Hara said. "Get your ass up here." Then he signed off.

ROGUE MISSION

There were three Marshals on duty at the entrance, one manning the body scanner, one handling the search of bags and briefcases, the third added to the detail because of the VIPs in attendance.

Sandor already had pulled out his credentials—he was using his standard State Department cover—and, as held them up, he said, “I’m here for Judge O’Hara. Running a little late.”

“Empty your pockets,” the Marshal sitting at the desk told him.

Sandor quickly complied, then reached under his suit jacket and withdrew the Walther PPK from its holster at the small of his back. “My carry license is in there,” he said, pointing to the billfold he had placed in the small tray on the table.

“Not any good in here,” the marshal said. “Not today.”

“You want to check my papers again?”

“I looked, don’t need to check it again,” the man said. “Since when does a State Department attaché need to carry?”

“It’s a dangerous world out there,” he said.

“Not in here,” the marshal told him. “You want to go upstairs, you leave the gun with us.”

Sandor didn’t have time for a pointless debate. “Your rules pal.”

The marshal took his time filling out a receipt, then had Sandor pass through the metal detector.

Shoving his billfold back in his pocket, Sandor asked, “Want to tell me where O’Hara’s courtroom is, or is that a state secret?”

The guard at the desk didn’t respond, but the man standing behind him said, “Second floor. If you take those stairs to your left it’ll be faster than the elevator.”

“Thanks,” Sandor said, then raced for the stairway, taking them two at a time till he reached the landing where he saw the sign for the courtroom of James J. O’Hara, District Judge.

Sandor took a deep breath as he approached the oak door. It had a small window and, looking inside, he could see O’Hara standing

JEFFREY S. STEPHENS

behind the bench, talking to the large group assembled before him. Sandor smiled and began to pull the door open.

Later, he would not remember the sound of the explosion, the flash of lights, or being knocked backward across the corridor. All he would remember is looking through that small window and seeing the Old Man.

CHAPTER 2

Hartford, Connecticut

The celebratory scene inside the courtroom instantly turned to chaos. Fire engulfed parts of the room as shards of broken wood and chunks of plaster rained down on the attendees. The sprinkler system went on, but the main damage had already been done. Some people managed to scramble for the door. Others screamed in agony, rolling on the floor, their clothing and hair alight with the fiery napalm. The concussive force of the three blasts had injured some, knocked others unconscious and left most of the group dazed and disoriented.

Four people were already dead, including James J. O'Hara and his law clerk, who were both standing behind the judge's bench when the first explosion ripped them to shreds. Marshals and federal agents on duty in other parts of the building came running when they heard the blasts. Emergency calls were immediately made for

JEFFREY S. STEPHENS

armed backup and to Hartford Hospital for as much mobile help as they could arrange.

The hallway outside the courtroom became the staging area for improvised triage, looking more like a medical response after an attack in Afghanistan than a government facility in Connecticut. Blood and smoke were everywhere as the fires were brought under control by a combination of the sprinklers, extinguishers and every available blanket, coat and tarp that could be found.

All the while, cries of intense pain echoed along the marble corridor.

Ambulances and EMT vans arrived, pulling onto the sidewalk and into the plaza outside the front entrance. Stretchers were carried up to the second floor where victims were being removed in order of the severity of their injuries.

One of the first responders pointed to the inert form lying off to the side of the corridor, unconscious and bleeding from his head and left leg. They hurried over, lifted Jordan Sandor onto a stretcher, and carried him out.



The top floors of the building, several flights above Judge O'Hara's courtroom, housed various local federal offices, including Homeland Security and the FBI. Their local assistant directors were already tied into Washington on a teleconference. The questions from their superiors were coming faster than information could be assembled.

Where did the explosives come from and how had they been hidden inside the courtroom?

What sort of devices had been used?

Was this the work of a terrorist group or a lone madman?

What was being done to scour the area for a possible second assault?

ROGUE MISSION

Had they locked down the building, preventing anyone but the injured from leaving?

What sort of perimeter was being established outside the building?

Who was dealing with the media already gathering on Main Street?

Did anyone have a list of those present for the ceremony?

Could they put together a list of everyone who had been in and out of the building in the past three days?

How many hurt, how many dead?



While those exchanges were taking place between Hartford and Washington, an agent at CIA headquarters in Langley received a Code Red on her computer screen. She printed the notification and hurried upstairs, where she was immediately shown into the office of Deputy Director Mark Byrnes.

The notice indicated that one of the victims of the Hartford attack had been identified in the hospital emergency room by his State Department credentials. His I.D. carried a special number that routed the alert away from Foggy Bottom and to Langley.

Jordan Sandor was down, and Byrnes acted swiftly, putting a team in motion.