



Blackjack: A Cross Novel

By Andrew Vachss

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As darkness fell, Viktor was standing in front of his headquarters. Despite the weather, he was wearing a thick coat made of bear fur and a hat of the same material.

"*Bolshe!*" he barked into a satellite phone. He listened to the response, then said, "*Ne vazhno!*" into the mouthpiece, and thumbed off the phone.

He signaled to a group of men standing close by. A line of five identical midnight blue Audi A8 sedans pulled to the empty curb. As Viktor prepared to enter the back seat of the middle car, the satellite phone in his hand seemed to change color, as if a shroud of shadow had been draped over it. A low sound, outside the human hearing threshold, came, short and sharp:

"????!"

#

Just before daylight, a Chicago cop stared through the windshield of his cruiser. "Holy Jumping Jesus Christ! I've been on the force since before you were born, kid. And I've never seen anything like ... that."

Both the retirement-age sergeant and the rookie sitting next to him were staring at bodies draped over a row of identical dark blue sedans. Each body had been skinned, graphically displaying that all were missing large bones, from femurs to skulls.

Neither cop noticed the city-camo shark as it slipped past the scene. Running without headlights, it looked more like a shifting shadow than a car.

Inside that shark, Buddha said, "Someone got to him first, boss." His gloved hands delicately fingered the thickly padded steering wheel as his eyes checked the instrument display projected on the lower windshield.

"Viktor always was an optimist."

"Huh?"

"He was a HALO jumper," Cross said. "Absolutely positive his chute would open whenever he decided to pull the chord. This time, the ground got there first."

"Chang sees a picture of this, he'll think you worked some magic, getting it done so fast."

"Yeah. So will the Russians."

"*They* paid, too?"

"More than Chang. The Russian Bear is a sacred icon to them. In their eyes, Viktor was looting a national treasure."

"But it had to be some of their own people doing the actual poaching."

"Sure. But that's their problem, at their end. We only got paid to solve the one at ours."

"Comes out perfect, boss. It's like Viktor's number came up, and we *hit* that number at the same time."

"Yeah," Cross says. "Perfect."

"What's wrong?"

"Come on, Buddha. You saw those bodies yourself. All of a sudden we got partners? *Silent* partners?"



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Editorial Review

Review

"Vachss effectively channels Predator and Rambo in this heated blend of fantasy and machismo in the urban jungle." --*Publishers Weekly*

"[A] heady mix of spy thriller, crime novel, and horror. . . . Vachss approaches it as he does all his work, imbuing it with a strong moral core. Without that moral core, *Blackjack* would simply be a better-than-usual take on the thriller genre; with it, the belief in and search for justice and loyalty that permeate the story echo in the hearts of its readers so that they see the world in a new light."

--*The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*

"Vachss has always been able to pit his protagonists against the darkness of the human heart to great effect." --*Booklist*

From the Author

There are places in America where the only reason for living is the hope of escape.

"Genre" is a ghetto, too.

Cross and crew originated in a series of short stories. I wanted to crank "Family of Choice"--the hallmark of my writing and my life--up another notch. To show how the childhood experiences of some--of *us*--can crystallize into an all-pervasive sense that they are not, and never will be, members of society. They don't turn into "outlaws"; nothing so romantic as that. "Outcasts" is closer, but it still doesn't convey the reality. For Cross and his crew, America is not their country. They have no country. They hate "them" all. They are together, bonded in blood, because there was no other place to go.

I needed an amoral protagonist, the better to illuminate the amorality of the world around him. Cross is a mercenary, but his crew is no A-Team. A man without a country, Cross is also a man without boundaries. He has no higher sense of honor, no "code," no loyalty to anything but "getting it done." A remorseless assassin, Cross's trademark is working the middle, betraying both the contractee and the victim. Hence his name. Even when confronted with the worst evil on this planet, Cross is as detached as an exterminator. And although he is a master tactician, his core is utter simplicity: he is a man for hire ... any other job description is meaningless.

From the Inside Flap

TO: UNIT 3 Chicago
FROM: DIRECTOR
IMPORTANCE: Critical

SUBJECT: Specimen Retrieval

TARGET: Shadowy hunter-killer teams, ID'ed via signature kills worldwide. Identifiable only by skull-spine removal from victims. No witnesses, no forensics, no particular race targeted. On rare occasions, scraps of what appear to be playing cards found at murder sites.

OBJECTIVE: Locate and capture any member of such teams. **MUST** be taken alive for study and observation.

AUTHORIZATION APPROVED FOR USE OF OUTSIDE CONTRACTOR: Individual ID'ed only as "Cross" and his team. A pure mercenary outfit, well known throughout criminal underworld--no inside informants available. Ruthless, undeterred by risk, rumored never to fail, but **UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES** to be trusted. No known political or social objective, but has proven treacherous when retained by government in the past.

UPDATE: Cross and his team claim to have identified a pattern to the signature-kills, and believe they can predict a forthcoming strike. They are prepared to personally confront-and-capture, but financial arrangement alone not sufficient. What you describe as a "Get Out of Jail Free" card is hereby **APPROVED**.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jeremy Turner:

Book is definitely written, printed, or highlighted for everything. You can understand everything you want by a reserve. Book has a different type. As you may know that book is important issue to bring us around the world. Alongside that you can your reading skill was fluently. A book Blackjack: A Cross Novel will make you to be smarter. You can feel far more confidence if you can know about everything. But some of you think that open or reading some sort of book make you bored. It is not make you fun. Why they could be thought like that? Have you seeking best book or ideal book with you?

Henry Baker:

The book Blackjack: A Cross Novel has a lot associated with on it. So when you read this book you can get a lot of gain. The book was written by the very famous author. Mcdougal makes some research ahead of write this book. That book very easy to read you will get the point easily after perusing this book.

James Fitzpatrick:

Many people spending their time by playing outside with friends, fun activity along with family or just watching TV all day every day. You can have new activity to spend your whole day by examining a book. Ugh, do you think reading a book can actually hard because you have to accept the book everywhere? It alright you can have the e-book, bringing everywhere you want in your Mobile phone. Like Blackjack: A Cross Novel which is keeping the e-book version. So , try out this book? Let's view.

Anna Hart:

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