



Blackjack: A Cross Novel

By Andrew Vachas

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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. The 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:

Gilbert Albright:

Why don't make it to be your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite reserve and reading a book. Beside you can solve your problem; you can add your knowledge by the book entitled Blackjack: A Cross Novel. Try to make book Blackjack: A Cross Novel as your good friend. It means that it can for being your friend when you really feel alone and beside that of course make you smarter than ever. Yeah, it is very fortuned for you. The book makes you a lot more confidence because you can know anything by the book. So , we need to make new experience and also knowledge with this book.

Priscilla McCreary:

Do you one of people who can't read enjoyable if the sentence chained inside straightway, hold on guys that aren't like that. This Blackjack: A Cross Novel book is readable through you who hate those straight word style. You will find the info here are arrange for enjoyable looking at experience without leaving actually decrease the knowledge that want to provide to you. The writer regarding Blackjack: A Cross Novel content conveys thinking easily to understand by most people. The printed and e-book are not different in the written content but it just different such as it. So , do you continue to thinking Blackjack: A Cross Novel is not loveable to be your top collection reading book?

Jewell Garza:

People live in this new morning of lifestyle always aim to and must have the extra time or they will get lot of stress from both daily life and work. So , whenever we ask do people have spare time, we will say absolutely indeed. People is human not just a robot. Then we consult again, what kind of activity are there when the spare time coming to anyone of course your answer will certainly unlimited right. Then ever try this one, reading textbooks. It can be your alternative throughout spending your spare time, the particular book you have read is usually Blackjack: A Cross Novel.

Pauline Jones:

Are you kind of stressful person, only have 10 or 15 minute in your time to upgrading your mind proficiency or thinking skill perhaps analytical thinking? Then you are having problem with the book when compared with can satisfy your limited time to read it because all of this time you only find publication that need more time to be study. Blackjack: A Cross Novel can be your answer since it can be read by anyone who have those short spare time problems.

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