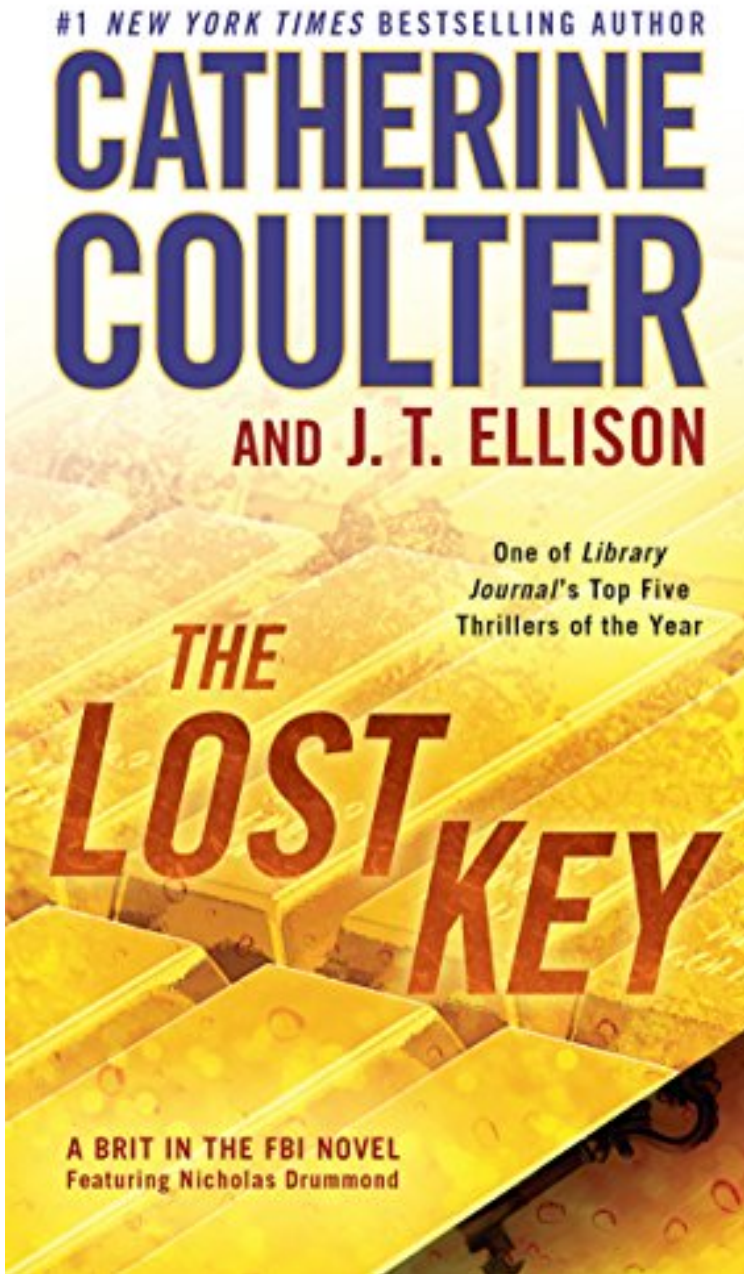


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The Lost Key (A Brit in the FBI, Book 2)



*Par Catherine Coulter, J. T. Ellison
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[Download pdf] The Lost Key (A Brit in the FBI, Book 2)

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur "A thriller packed with nonstop action, real-life name-dropping and enough cutting-edge science to make you wonder how much of it could be true." Kirkus sThe newest entry in the sizzling international thriller series featuring Nicholas Drummond, from #1 New York Times bestselling author Catherine Coulter.Freshly minted FBI agent Nicholas Drummond is barely out of his Quantico training

when he and his partner, Mike Caine, are called to investigate a stabbing on Wall Street. Their investigation, however, yields more questions than answers. It quickly becomes clear that the victim, John Pearce, was more than the naval historian and antiques dealer he appeared to be. What Drummond doesn't know is that buying and selling rare books was Pearce's cover, and that he had devoted his life to discovering the whereabouts of a missing World War I U-boat concealing a stash of gold bullion, and an unexpected surprise that only raises more questions. When Drummond and Caine find both of Pearce's adult children have disappeared, the case assumes a new sense of urgency. The FBI agents know their best lead lies in the victim's cryptic final words: The key is in the lock. But what key? What lock? The search for Adam and Sophia Pearce takes them on an international manhunt, which threatens to run them afoul of an eccentric billionaire industrialist with his own plans not only for the lost gold, but the creation of a weapon unlike anything the world has ever seen.

EXTRAIT ACKNOWLEDGMENTS PROLOGUE

Lower Slaughter, Cotswolds, England, September 1917. Ansonia was dead. And all those brave men who'd risked everything to end the bloody war were dead with her, and they'd left wives and children to wonder what had happened to them, to mourn, endlessly. Had their deaths been quick? Crushing tons of icy water and then it was over, quickly, so quickly, they didn't know the end was on them? He prayed it was so. All he had left of her was the letter she'd stuffed in Leo's coat pocket to give to him, his first name written in her hand on the envelope. Josef. All that was inside were her hastily scribbled words explaining what she'd done and why, and how much she loved him and Leo, and how, with God's help, she would see them soon. Stay safe, stay safe, and all would be well. Signed simply, Ansonia. Josef closed his eyes against the pain of it, a pain so deep he didn't think he could bear it. But he had to, he had no choice, for there was Leo, their son, depending on him since his mother was gone. He saw her now, his brave, foolhardy Ansonia, saw them together that last night, and thought now her smile had been sad, accepting, as if she'd known she would die. He shut it off. Josef Rothschild would mourn her forever, but not yet, not just yet. He stared through the front window down the long, dark drive, then over at the thick night dark woods. Pearce would be here soon with five other Order members. William Pearce, Viscount Chambers, the head of the Highest Order, his friend and ally for such a short time. He knew it would last until they both breathed their last breaths, this odd friendship of theirs, a German and an Englishman, forged that long-ago night at the battleground of Verdun. He wondered if William would one day be the Prime Minister. Josef wouldn't doubt it. Even though William was young, he already had power, wealth, but most important, he had an excellent brain, a clear head, and honor. Josef stared into the darkness. Where were they? Six men of the Highest Order were coming to hear him announce that their plan had succeeded. The Highest Order. Josef had always thought the formal title of their society sounded so lofty as to be ordained by God, but now all members simply called it the Order. Yes, six members of the Order were coming to hear not only that they now had the Kaiser's gold, but that they also possessed Marie's key and her book of secrets. Yes, they'd won, they would deal the Kaiser a death blow, and they would raise a toast to Marie, magnificent Marie, architect of a weapon so powerful the one who owned it would rule the world. But there wasn't to be wild triumph, because the scores of gold bars worth millions of Deutsche marks, the Kaiser's private treasury, the book, and the key were lost to both Germany and England in waters so deep he couldn't imagine the U-boat ever being found. In England's hands, having the gold would cripple the Kaiser's war, but having Marie's horrifying weapon would deal a death blow. Now no one would have either the gold or the weapon, ever. Still, he wondered if someone in the distant future would find the U-boat and the Kaiser's gold and Marie's key. Would they marvel at the lunacy of men long dead? Marvel at their greed, their eagerness to crush one another, their butchering of the innocent? Would they look at Marie's weapon and be unable to fathom how any man, any country, could sanction its use? Josef pulled the thin curtain back from the window and stared out into full darkness. There was no moon and the few stars shimmered off the ground fog covering the field beyond the cottage. The men would leave their cars hidden and come into the cottage one by one. The Order was always careful, rabidly so in wartime.

Soon, soon now. Josef looked over at the trundle bed in the corner, at his son, Leo, exhausted from his ordeal, still in shock. At last he was sleeping soundly, legs pulled up against his chest, one thin arm dangling over the edge of the cot, the small white hand open. Josef felt such fear, such love, that for a moment he couldn't breathe. If his son had died, it would have been his fault. But he was alive, he'd survived the hellish trip from Berlin to Scotland, the specter of death constantly riding on his small shoulders. Josef prayed Leo had understood all he'd told him on their trip from Scotland to William Pearce's cottage, understood that what his father and the other men had tried to do had been for him, for all the children of this useless, bloody war. Every time he'd said Ansonia's name, he'd tasted his own tears. And when he was through talking, the tears

shiny on his cheeks, Leo had slipped his small hand into his fathers and whispered, Before we left her, Mama told me you were a hero. Now I understand why. What will happen now, Papa?Josef was humbled. He had no answer.He looked out the window again. He saw a shadow running across the field, and another, wraiths in the night, the darkness bleeding around them. They would stagger their arrivals, each coming from a different direction, a few minutes between them. Six men, dressed in black, weapons at their sides. Three carried Webley.455 Marks, standard issue, and two had Mauser C96s tucked in their holsters. They were prepared for anything even though they should be safe enough, here in a small cottage deep in the Cotswolds, expecting to hear news of their triumph.The first man stopped, whistled loudly through his teeth in a poor imitation of a whip-poor-will. Josef whistled in return, and the man started forward again. A series of calls and answers began behind him.The first knock sounded. Four taps, then two pounds. The signal.Josef took one last look at Leo, then pinched out the lone candle. He opened the door, welcomed each of them. Their only goal was to stop Kaiser Wilhelms war.Only five men arrived. Where was William Pearce? He was never late. Josef gave all of them coffee, then, unable to wait, said, The U-boat went down. The kaiser has lost both his gold and Maries book and the key. And we did, too.Dead silence, then, with succinct finality, Wallace Benton-Hurt, head of the Bank of England, said, So its a stalemate.Yes, said Josef.I hear something, it must be William, said Grayson Lankford, and went to the door.Josef said, Wait until he knocks.No one knows were here, Josef. Youre being paranoid.Yes, I am, Josef said, and that is the only reason I am still alive. Wait for the knock.Everyone waited, watching the door. Footsteps, then a knock. Two raps, sharp, like the end of a stick, or a rifle butt.Not the right signal.Josef knew theyd been found out. Leo.He grabbed Leo into his arms and carried him to the closet. Leos eyes opened, unseeing at first, then he focused on his fathers face. Listen to me, you have to stay here until I come for you. Do not make a sound. Do you understand me?Leo knew fear, and he saw it on his fathers face. Are we in danger, Papa?Yes, the enemy found us. You must keep quiet, Leo. Remember what I told you. If something happens to me, you tell no one what I told you. Trust no one. Remember, no matter what you hear, you keep quiet. He kissed his boy, wrapped the blanket around him, and closed the closet door just as bullets shattered the glass windows and the front door burst open.DDAY ONE1FBI New York Field Office26 Federal Plaza7:25 a.m.What in bloody hell have I done?Nicholas Drummond reported for duty at the FBI's New York Headquarters smartly at 7:00 a.m., as instructed. After twenty minutes with human resources, he felt a bit like a schoolboy: stand here, walk there, smile for your photograph, heres your pass, dont lose it. It was worse than the FBI Academy with their strict rules, the uniforms, the endless drills, and more like his training at Hendon Police College with Hamish Penderley and his team.The administrative realities of moving from New Scotland Yard to the FBI in New York were decidedly less romantic than the initial prospect had been. Months earlier, Dillon Savich, head of the Criminal Apprehension Unit at FBI Headquarters in Washington, D.C., had encouraged Nicholas to make a new home in the FBI, and hed accepted. It was now the end of May, graduation from Quantico and the FBI Academy two weeks in the past, and he was officially an FBI special agent, and technically at the bottom of the food chain.Again.Twice hed done this. The first time hed left the Foreign Office to work for the Metropolitan Police in London. Hed survived those first days and hed survive these, too.And even better, you dont have Hamish Penderley to ride you now, making you do tactical drills at 5:00 a.m. Zacherys a very different sort. So buck up.Nicholas knew he should have started out in a small Bureau office in the Midwest, gotten his feet wet, but Dillon Savich had gotten him assigned to the New York Field Office, as promised, working directly for Supervisory Special Agent Milo Zachery, a man Nicholas knew and trusted, with Special Agent Michaela Caine as his partner.When at last they issued him his service weapon, he felt complete, the heavy weight of the Glock on his hip comforting, familiar.Freshly laminated and now armed, hed been walked to the twenty-third floor, led through the maze of the cube farm, and ushered into a small space, blue-walled with some sort of fuzzy fabric, the kind Velcro would adhere to, with a brown slab of wood-grained Formica as a desktop. There was a computer, several hard drives, two file trays labeled IN and OUT, and a chair.The cubicle was so small he could easily touch each side with his arms outstretched, and that made the tiniest bit of claustrophobia sneak in. He needed more monitors and more shelving and maybe hed soon feel at home. Once in the zone on his computers, the close quarters wouldnt be a problem.He dropped his briefcase on the floor next to the chair, stashed a small black go bag in his bottom drawer, and took a seat. He spun the chair around in a circle, legs drawn up to avoid crashing. Small, yes, but it would do. He didnt plan to spend much time sitting here, anyway. Part of the deal hed made with Savich meant Nicholas would be working ad hoc with him at times, running forensic point on cases in Washington. From what hed already experienced working with Savich and Sherlock and Mike

Caine, he was in for a ride. A low, throaty voice said near his ear, Needs a bit of sprucing up, dont you think? How about a nice photo of the queen, front and center? Speak of the devil. The queen is hanging happily over my bed in my new digs. He bent his head back to see Agent Mike Caine looking down at him, smiling widely. She was wearing her signature black jeans, motorcycle boots, her blond hair pulled back in a ponytail. Her badge hung on a lanyard around her neck, and her black-rimmed reading glasses were tucked into her blouse pocket. I wonder why I didnt smell you first. And he leaned up, sniffed. Ah, there it is, that lovely jasmine, like my mum. Hi, Mike, long time no see. Yeah, yeah, all of two weeks since your graduation. So youre all settled in to these new digs of yours? By the way, where are your new digs? He didnt want to tell her, didnt want to tell anyone, it was too embarrassing. Fact was, hed lost a big argument with his grandfather about where hed lay his head in New York. He shrugged, looked over her shoulder at several agents walking by. All settled in. A fairly nice bed in an okay place over there. And he waved his hand vaguely toward the east. She cocked her head at him, and he said quickly, You look pretty good after being on your own for four months. When can we get out of here? Champing at the bit for a case already, Special Agent Drummond? Youve only been here fifteen minutes. We havent even had time to go over the coffee schedule and introduce you around. Are we calling you Nick or Nicholas these days? You know what they say about rolling stones and moss. Nicholas will do fine. She looked at her watch. Youre in luck. Weve caught a murder. He felt the punch of adrenaline. A murder? Is it terrorism related? I dont think so. I heard about it two minutes ago. Time to get briefed. Milo Zachery joined them in the hall. In his tailored gray suit, white shirt, and purple-and-black striped tie, Nicholas thought he looked a lot snazzier than Penderley ever had. Slick clothes, fresh haircut. He looked like a big-dog federal agent all the way to his highly polished wing tips. Nicholas knew Zachery was focused, smart, and willing to let his agents use their brains with only subtle hands on the reins. Nicholas shook his new bosss hand. Good to see you, Drummond. Ill handle your briefing myself. Walk with me. Mike gave him a manic grin, her adrenaline on a level with his, and he was reminded of that night in Paris several months earlier, Mike barely upright, leaning against the overturned couch, bleeding from a gunshot to the arm, her face beat up, and smiling. He thanked the good Lord she was here and whole and ready to kick butt. Nicholas smiled back and gestured for her to go first. Such lovely manners from the first Brit in the FBI. I could get used to this. Still cheeky, are we? Its good to see that some things havent changed. Come on, you two. Zachery walked them past his office, down the blue-carpeted senior management hallway, straight out the door and to the elevators. As he punched the down button, he said, Youre headed to Twenty-six Wall Street. Stabbing. The NYPD called us since its on federal land, so its our case. I thought it would be a good idea to get Drummond here liaising with the locals as soon as possible. And arent you two lucky, someone managed to get themselves dead on your first morning. Go on down there and figure out what happened. The elevator doors opened and Zachery waved them in. Drummond, I know youre going to be our big cyber-crime computer-terrorism guy, but we also need to teach you to drive on the right side of the road, get your boots dirty on the ground first. He smiled and clapped Nicholas on the shoulder. Glad youre with us, Drummond. Welcome to the FBI. Good hunting. He turned, and said over his shoulder, Oh, yes. Mike, keep him in line. 2 Mikes black Crown Vic waited for them in the garage. She jangled the car keys at Nicholas, then drew them back. Maybe I should drive, even though you need the practice. Wall Streets pretty crazy. Contrary to popular belief, I do know how to manage the streets of New York. I have American blood, too, you know. She laughed and got behind the wheel. Once they were out of the garage, she said, Next time out, youll drive. Its a requirement that you know all the streets. But not today. So tell me, did you really live up to Savichs lofty standards at the Academy? And Sherlocks? I tried my pitiful best, Agent Caine. He watched her come within an inch of a lane-cutting taxi without blinking an eye. What have you been doing here in New York for the last two weeks? He never looked away from the pedestrian zigzagging in front of the Crown Vic. Oh, a bit of this and that, getting set up, thats about it. Not to mention I shopped for furniture until I nearly cut my own wrists, fought with Nigel on where all the bloody furniture should go, and was forced to have dinner with my ex at a French in-place big on presentation and light on food. In short, I havent used my brain for two bloody weeks but he didnt tell her any of that. She sped through a yellow light. Ive missed having you around. Come on, now, tell me about your new place. Not in this lifetime. Nothing much to tell, really. Its a place to live, thats all. Nicholass grandfather, in a magnanimous show of support for his grandsons decision to move to America, had purchased Nicholas a brownstone. No matter how hard Nicholas had protested, the baron, and his parents, he suspected, refused to allow Nicholas his wish, an anonymous apartment somewhere in Chelsea. He was now saddled with a behemoth town house on East 69th Street, much to his butler Nigels delight. Five bedrooms,

five floors. Oh, yes, this sort of opulence was just the ticket for fitting in with the rest of the agents in the New York Field Office. Mike slowly turned onto a street packed with pedestrians. I can't wait to see it. Invite me over for a beer later, all right? And again he thought, Not in this lifetime. He said, Where is our crime scene? Just off Wall Street. Right there. Mike threaded through dozens of people across to Pine Street, not far from Federal Hall. He saw the yellow sawhorse barrier with NYPD on it, three blue-and-whites, lights revolving, reflecting off the stone buildings. They badged the NYPD cop at the barrier, signed in to the scene, and were led to the small side street. It was going to be a beautiful day, he saw, already warming nicely.

Considering the number of crime scenes he'd handled in the pouring rain in London, this certainly was preferable. What do we have here? he asked the young NYPD officer standing inside the tape. His badge read F. WILSON, and he looked barely old enough to vote, much less be a cop. Even though Nicholas knew he couldn't be more than five years older than the cop, he felt ancient, until Wilson spoke like the seasoned professional he was. Stabbing, Wilson said, and aren't you in luck, it's right there on your land. Another five feet and it would be ours, but no, this guy decides to get himself dead and make it all yours. I hear it's your first day on the job. Welcome to New York. Thank you. Wilson grinned. We've been canvassing, got a small group of people held aside who were nearby when it happened. Most say the suspect was a Caucasian male, brown hair, medium height, wearing jeans and a white hoodie. Nicholas looked over at the small knot of people standing on the street corner, gaping at the scene, some recording everything with their phones, others standing quietly, obviously shell-shocked. He said, Rather a detailed description, that. I know, right? Amazing, really, since most witnesses can rarely agree on the sex of the suspect. Talk about lucking out from the statements so far, there were two men arguing, then a struggle, then one guy turned away and the other man stabbed him from behind and took off running. Mike said, Hold everyone here, Officer Wilson. We'll want to speak to them as well. We need to get a look at the body, and we'll be right back. Wilson saluted her and moved away from the tape to let them in. Nicholas took his time walking toward the dead man, noticed Mike was taking in everything as well. Special Agent Louisa Barry, one of their crime scene techs, was snapping on nitrile gloves, ready to get to work. Nicholas smiled at her, then went down on his haunches beside a man who was seriously dead. He was in his late forties to early fifties, his brown eyes staring sightlessly into the sky, salt-and-pepper hair combed slightly to the side to cover the beginnings of a receding hairline, his suit rumpled and creased. From the angle of his body on the pavement, and the way his arms were flung out from his body, Nicholas thought he'd fallen to his knees, then onto his back and died. The blood pooled beneath him, dark and thick, but it was disturbed, like a child's finger painting, swirls and whorls whipping across the sidewalk. What were you arguing about? Why'd he stab you in the back? See anything interesting? Mike asked, studying the blood pool. It's what I'm not seeing that's interesting, Nicholas said. No murder weapon. The guy stabbed him, then pulled out the knife and took off. I wonder if any of the witnesses saw the killer do that. Mike said, He still had his wallet, isn't that right, Louisa? She looked up at Louisa, holding the man's belongings. Right here. Nicholas asked, What's his name? He hated calling a once living, breathing man a corpse. He deserved more than that. Jonathan Charles Pearce. Lived on the Upper East Side. Money and cards left in the wallet. His cell's a BlackBerry Touch, and here's a nice old watch and a set of keys. Cell is password protected, I can't access it without my tools. Nicholas said, Do you carry a UFED in the field, perchance? Is that British for Universal Forensic Extraction Device? And she grinned. Yeah, so happens I have a Touch Ultimate on the truck. Hang on a minute. Good, he said. Are there any cameras around? Louisa said, Nothing that points directly to this spot, but there's a traffic cam at the intersection of Pine and William, and the building itself has a camera on the corner. Might have something from one of those. Excellent, Louisa, thank you. By the way, Nicholas? It's good to have you on board. Welcome to New York. It's good to be here. In the next instant, Louisa was headed to the mobile command unit. Mike said, Glad she brought it. With the UFED we'll get the pass code broken and access the data in no time. So, Nicholas, it doesn't appear Mr. Pearce was the victim of a robbery. No, it would seem not. A fight between two men. About what? Whatever it was, the killer lost it and stabbed Mr. Pearce in the back with a dozen people looking on. Nicholas looked up at a sharp whistle to see a tall, beefy older man heading their way, people getting out of his way. He looked like a guided missile, ready to clear the scene and move on to his next case. Here's the ME, and good news for us, he's the best, Mike said. You'll like him. The man reached them and stuck out his hand. Nicholas thought he meant to shake, but he was handing them both nitrile gloves. You're not allowed anywhere near my body without proper protection. See to it, now. Mike snapped the gloves over the ones she was already wearing. She never argued with Janovich. Good morning, Dr. Janovich. Now we're double protected. I'd like you to meet my new partner, Special Agent Nicholas

Drummond. We worked together on the Koh-i-Noor diamond case. Today's his first day. They shook hands. Janovich immediately pulled off his gloves and put on a fresh pair. If I remember correctly, you knew the woman who died during that case. I'm sorry, that was tough. Nicholas felt a familiar stab of pain. Thank you, it was. I was Inspector Elaine Yorks superior at New Scotland Yard. But now I'm here in America, working for the FBI. Welcome, welcome. I don't know why we have a foreigner working for us, but in the long scheme of things, it doesn't matter, does it? We shook hands, change your gloves. Mike said, This particular foreigner was born in L.A. Do you remember the sitcom A Fish Out of Water, with Mitzi Manders? She's Bo Horsley's sister, and Nicholas's mom. Janovich blinked, his mouth widened in a huge smile. You're kidding. I loved that show. She is a beautiful lady, and she had wonderful comic timing. Tell your mother she has a fan in the New York OCME, will you? He gave Nicholas a closer look and smiled. Since you're a foreigner, that stands for Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. I'll tell her, and thank you, Nicholas said, amused, but Janovich had already begun examining Mr. Pearce's body, talking as he worked. Nicholas crouched down so he could listen in. Stab wound to the right kidney. Took him down fast and hard from behind. Created quite a mess. I'd say this poor man bled out within three or four minutes. The blade would need to be at least five inches long to make a gash that deep. Not much of a cut in the shirt, I'm betting a stiletto of some sort. Who's our killer, then? Nicholas asked. Dr. Janovich glanced up at Nicholas and started, as if surprised to see him there at face level. He flashed a rare smile. I guess I'll have to let you figure that out. Nicholas stood, groaning a little as his knees popped. Louisa hurried over to them. She handed Nicholas Pearce's cell phone. I got in, no problem. You'll see Mr. Pearce received several texts recently. He was supposed to meet someone with the initials EP here this morning. Nicholas said, There was a short conversation between Pearce and EP. Listen to this: I have news. Meet me at the Pine Street entrance of Fed Hall. And Pearce wrote back: Can't get downtown this a.m. Meet me at store instead? EP: Nine-one-one. Pearce: I hope this is the good kind of nine-one-one. On my way. THERE WAS a fifteen-minute gap in time, then another outgoing message from 8:15 a.m. Only thirty minutes earlier. I'm here, where are you? Both Mike and Nicholas could imagine Pearce walking quickly, distracted, worrying about what this EP and his 911 alert were all about, wondering what was so important it couldn't wait. The good kind of 911? What did that mean? And who was EP? Evidently, Mike said, EP didn't show up. Do you think it was a ploy to draw Pearce here to kill him? Or maybe EP did show up and it wasn't a good kind of nine-one-one. They argued first, then EP killed him. Whatever, Mr. Pearce knew his killer. Maybe. Janovich began his prep to take the body back to the OCME. Nicholas went down on his knees next to Mr. Jonathan Pearce. He said quietly, We'll find who did this, sir. Mark my words. Mike said, You know, we've had a lot of trouble with gangs recently. Committing a murder in broad daylight is a surefire way through initiation. Anything is possible. But it seems rather unlikely that a New York gang would congregate on Wall Street and send text messages to their victims. No, generally not. Unless it was a gang of stockbrokers. He grinned at her. I know what you mean. They're a deadly bunch in London. Here, too. Well, then, Nicholas said, let's get out of Dr. Janovich's way and see what the witnesses have to tell us. They made their way to the group of witnesses huddled on the corner. There was another crowd gathered across the street, gaping and pointing, shooting more video with their phones, probably calling all their friends. He didn't think there was a single crime scene in the world today that wasn't recorded down to the blood on the sidewalk. Most of the witnesses were clearly upset, but a few were annoyed at having to stick around to talk to the police and be late to work. But most were eager to tell what they'd seen. Mike took the lead. I'm Special Agent Caine, and this is Special Agent Drummond, FBI. We'd appreciate your telling us exactly what you saw. A furious babble erupted, and Mike put up her hands. One at a time, please. Sir? He was the eldest of the group, a businessman in a gray wool suit. I was walking across the street and heard the two men arguing. I looked over to see the older man fall. He swallowed. The dead man. Nicholas asked, How much older was he than the man who stabbed him? Twenty years, maybe. The guy, the killer, he looked about twenty-five, thirty. No more. Mike was taking notes in her small spiral-bound reporter's notebook. Could you hear what they were arguing about? Not really, but they were fighting over something, I don't know what. It was the phone, said an older woman dressed in head-to-toe white cashmere, holding a small Chihuahua. The guy wanted his phone. After he stabbed the older man, he grabbed the phone and used it. I had the most absurd thought that he was calling nine-one-one. But who would stab someone, then call nine-one-one? But then people started yelling at the man and he dropped the phone and took off running. She'd clearly been crying, her eyes were red and bloodshot. I'll never forget the way he looked right at me, before he ran away. She shuddered and broke off. Mike watched her frown, then she yelled, pointing, That's him! He's come back. Right over there he's standing in that crowd of people across

the street! People around them were shuffling to get a better look, and the Chihuahua was barking his head off.4 Nicholas jerked around to see the man looking straight at him. The man didnt hesitate. He shoved his way through the crowd, pushing people down, then he was free, running full out. He disappeared around the corner. The crowd was shouting, an NYPD officer who was nearby hesitated a moment, then took off after him. Nicholas shouted to Mike, Come on, come on, after him. The streets were packed with people at the start of the workday. Nicholas passed the cop, his long runners legs eating up the sidewalk. He saw the suspect half a block away, darting in and out of the crowds. He was in good shape, strong, fast as an Olympic sprinter, the bastard, pouring on the speed. A woman fell in front of Nicholas, and he yanked her to her feet as he passed, shouting to the man, Stop, FBI. Stop running now! Of course the man ignored him, continued running south. Where did he think he could go? Battery Park at the end of Manhattan? If he tried to jump on the Staten Island Ferry, Nicholas had him, no way hed be able to speed through the throngs of people. But if he caught the tubeno, the subway then hed be gone. Mike, where was Mike? He glanced over his shoulder, she was two yards behind him, her stride smooth and fast. His mobile rang, but he ignored it. The man turned a corner, and Mike shouted, Turn right, turn right now, theres a street across to Broadway, Exchange Place, cut him off. Im going straight, well box him in. Nicholas was nearly hit by a wildly honking cab, heard the driver cursing him, but he never slowed. He burst out onto Broadway, nearly behind Mr. Olympic. Ten yards, five Nicholas could smell his sweat, yes, now he had him. Nicholas reached out an arm to snag the mans shoulder when he turned, something in his hand, and he pointed it at Nicholas. And Nicholas was on the ground, doubled over, pain shooting through his body. His muscles jerked and jittered, his teeth clenched, his entire body cramped in on itself until he was sure it was all over for him. He couldnt breathe then the pain stopped. His breath came in short gasps. He shook his head to clear his brain. Slowly, he rolled onto his hands and knees. Mr. Olympic was long gone. Nicholas saw a small rectangular black box on the ground five feet away. It was a Taser. Frigging Mr. Olympic had Tasered him. Then Mike was on the ground with him, hands running over his body. Where are you hit, where are you hit? Im all right, really, Im all right. Then what happened? Wheres our guy? Nicholas pointed at the Taser. Mike couldnt believe it. She stared at the small black Taser, her heart still kettledrumming, pumping blood and fear through her. I saw you go down. I thought hed shot you, the way you were jerking around on the ground, but I didnt hear a shot. Thank heaven it was only a Taser. Yes, only a Taser, he said as he ripped the Taser barbs out of his side. At least it was getting easier to think and put words together. Can you walk, or do I need to carry you? He wanted to laugh at that visual but couldnt get any spit in his mouth. He slowly got to his feet. Agent Ben Houstons voice crackled from the walkie-talkie Mike carried in her jacket pocket. Were here to back you up. Weve spotted the suspect. Hes on foot heading north on Trinity Place. Mike, Nicholas, hes parallel to your position. Were moving to intercept. Cut across Rector and stop him. Nicholas was rolling his shoulders. What? Did Mr. Olympic hang around to see what would happen next? Come on, come on, Mike shouted, pulled on Nicholass arm and took off again. Can you do it? I can. Bloody hell. Nicholas shook off the last of the Taser effects, felt his adrenaline kick in, and triangulated the area in his head, grateful his brain was back in working order. If they cut up to Rector they could intercept, especially if Ben could drive the man toward the box. Then a phalanx of agents could converge on the target from four sides. He rushed after Mike, slower than before, but found the more he moved, the better his body parts worked. One block gone, now two. Shouts from the walkie as they closed in on three sides. They turned the corner onto Trinity and there he was. Nicholas wanted him badly and pushed to his limit, shoving people out of the way, ignoring shouts, cries, curses. Mr. Olympic ran into the street to get away from the hordes of people and took off, one fast disbelieving look at Nicholas. Nicholas followed, heard Mike shouting, Push him south, push him south. He glanced back, saw her coming fast, knew how determined she could be. He signaled for her to duck to the left and hed turn Mr. Olympic right into her waiting arms. He hoped shed deck him. This time it went right. Mike flanked him, ignoring the shouts and screams, the honking cars and taxis, and Nicholas pushed on the last of his speed, launched himself and tackled the man hard. They were locked together, pummeling each other, as they rolled into the street right in front of an oncoming NYPD patrol car. Nicholas saw the bumper coming and shoved Mr. Olympic to the curb. He rolled as the patrol car slammed on its brakes and came to a stop an inch from Nicholass leg.5 Nicholas lay there for a heartbeat, not believing the car hadnt hit him. He sat up slowly, sent a prayer of thanks heavenward. But there was no time to rejoice that he hadnt been smeared across the street. He grabbed Mr. Olympics leg and landed on top of him. No way was he getting away again. The idiot tried to twist around to hit him, but Nicholas clipped Mr. Olympic in the jaw with his elbow, stunning him. Perfect. Nicholas jumped to his feet and pulled the man up with him. He thought of the

Taser and how he'd been sure he was dying and slammed Mr. Olympic hard against a parked Audi, face-first. Mike grabbed his arms behind him while Nicholas frisked him. He found an HK MK23 pistol, a mobile phone, and two long-bladed stilettos, one of them still stained with Mr. Pearce's blood. Nicholas jerked the man's head back. Listen to me, were federal agents. What in bloody hell are you up to, mate? Why did you kill Mr. Pearce? A sneer, nothing more. Mike got in his face. You assaulted a federal agent with your Taser, you idiot, and that means no one's going to play with you anymore. Tell me your name, now. Tell us why you murdered Mr. Pearce. What were you arguing about with him? Mr. Olympic bared his teeth, meant to be a grin, but wasn't. Mike said, No wallet, no ID, but you'll be in the system. We'll know who you are within the hour, so you might as well tell us now. Come on, mate, don't be daft. Who are you? The man opened his mouth, but no words came out. They saw a look of horror in his eyes, then panic, sharp, cold panic. Mr. Olympic's eyes rolled back in his head. He seized, a bubbling white froth spewed out of his mouth, then he slumped against Nicholas. Mike screamed into the walkie, We need a medic, right now. Nicholas let him slide down to the sidewalk. Mike felt for his pulse, started a CPR checklist, but Nicholas pulled her back. Let me go, we need him alive. It's too late, he said. They looked at the man's face, gone blue now, dark eyes staring blankly up at them. A few more muscle twitches and he stopped moving. Bystanders were in a circle around them, excited and horrified, knowing death when they saw it. The NYPD officer who'd nearly hit Nicholas rushed to help. He saw the man lying on the sidewalk. What happened? I didn't think I hit you. What happened to him? No, you didn't hit me, it's something else, Nicholas said, and turned to Mike. Stay with him. He stood, raised his creds high, told the crowd he was FBI and they needed to move back, this was now a crime scene and there was nothing to see, it was all over. He heard Mike say to the officer, I don't know what happened. We were chasing him; he killed a man on Wall Street, but he went down; why, I don't know. We were trying to help. Special Agent Ben Houston pulled up in a Crown Vic beside him, hopped out of the car. He took one look at the dead man and said, What happened to him? What'd you do to him? Nicholas said to Ben, aware the crowd was pressing in again, I didn't do anything to him. I'd finally managed to bring him down. He started seizing and foaming at the mouth. Whatever happened, Mr. Olympic did it to himself. Mr. Olympic? You mean, like he had cyanide in his tooth? Maybe, not necessarily cyanide, but a bloody fast poison of sorts in his mouth. He frowned at the blue face. But why would he kill himself? What the devil is going on here? No answer to that. Mike said to Ben, We need an ID on this guy, pronto. Nicholas is right, something's not kosher here, and it's possible the Devil does have something to do with it. Nicholas said, I wonder why he stayed around. He looked down at Mr. Olympic. Why? 6 Berlin, Germany 4:00 p.m. The mission was shot to hell. Mrz watched, tense, unable to do anything. He knew every single individual in this huge room was even more frightened of failure than he was and that was because, simply, they were scared to death of him. They were right to be; he was lethal and soulless and took pleasure in his work. No one dared to look at him standing quietly in the back of the large windowless room, watching, always watching. The nerve center, the workers called it, all of them focused on the single massive monitoring screen on the wall, covered in twenty blue and green quadrants. Fifteen analysts worked multiple computer angles. They were responsible for monitoring each agent's heart rate, his breathing, his visuals, his audio. They saw everything the agent saw, heard what he said, heard what those around him said. It never ceased to amaze Mrz, this invasion of another's mind, but all the analysts were used to being inside a live human being and participating from afar. Senior Analyst Bernstein was in charge of Mr. X, with him every step he took, inside him, watching and listening from the moment Mr. X had deplaned and the mission had gone live. And gone to hell. Mrz thought of his boss and tasted fear. First Mr. X had killed the Orders Messenger. Then, because he stayed at the scene so they could see what was unfolding, he'd been spotted by that ridiculous woman and her little yapping dog. All of them had followed the chase, watched the big dark-haired FBI agent finally take down Mr. X, saw him hauled to his feet and cuffed. The room was dead silent, watching, listening. Then alarms began going off and the room exploded into action. Bernstein yelled, What happened, what happened? Mr. X has collapsed, his visuals are down, his eyes are gone. I've lost heart function! Ears are down. Ears are down. He activated his gel pack! He must have thought he was going to be taken. Panic rippled through the room, moving silently from man to man as they now focused on Mr. X. After a moment, the heart monitor beeped long and low, then went flatline. Mr. X's quadrant suddenly went black with a snap, as if a switch had been flipped off. Horrified silence. Mrz spoke quietly, no need to raise his voice. Mr. Bernstein, since we've lost Mr. X, please give me the satellite. Bernstein's voice shook and he hated it, but his belly crawled with the taste of failure, and fear. Yes, sir. Coming, sir. Online in three, two, one. All twenty-four quadrants flashed to a new scene, a bird's-eye view of New York rapidly winnowing

down as the satellite cameras telescoped toward the chaotic New York street. A quick screen refresh and the scene was in perfect focus. There are people hovering over the body, I can't get a clear shot of Mr. X. Mrz said, Alter the angle. I'm trying, sir. We'll have to wait thirty seconds while the bird is repositioned. Do it faster. The analysts were perfectly still, breath held, while Bernstein madly tapped on his keyboard, moving the low earth-orbiting satellite a hundred miles above the scene a fraction to capture the proper image. He managed the realignment in record time. Fifteen seconds flat. He wiped his sweating hands on his lab coat, then ran the camera sight down as fast as he could, and there it was, the shot slightly moved, the main screen taken up by the faces of the two FBI agents standing over Mr. X's body. The male FBI agent stood and moved away, forcing the growing crowd backward. The camera detail was so fine they could see the bruises starting on his jaw, hear a deep sigh from the blond agent as she stood and watched the medics work on Mr. X, who was clearly very dead. Why did he activate his gel pack? Mrz asked. Bernstein said, Sir, I don't know that he did. It seems that the agent who took him down may have hit him in the jaw at precisely the perfect spot to activate the gel. Show me. The film was rewound and played again at half speed. With a red laser pointer, Bernstein showed the agent's elbow connecting with the back of Mr. X's jaw. One-in-a-million shot, sir. We couldn't have known an exterior punch would be enough to release the poison. Or maybe Mr. X was fiddling with it, debating whether it was necessary. He didn't want to be taken. He sacrificed himself to protect us. Not likely, Mrz thought. Show me the FBI agent who hit him. Who is he? The agents at the scene were calling him Nicholas Drummond, sir. Mrz said in his same calm, terrifying voice, Well, you idiots, what are you waiting for? Give me data, right now, screen one. Who are we dealing with? I want everything you can find on Special Agent Drummond. Who he is, where he comes from, what he ate for breakfast. All of you, go. Five minutes passed in tense silence. The only background noise was the clatter of the keyboards.

Finally, Bernstein stood, ran a hand through his thinning hair, and forced himself to walk to Mrz. Sir? Yes? About the target, sir. His last words. The key is the lock. Yes. Not exactly, sir. We've replayed it several times, and we believe what he actually said is the key is in the lock. In the lock. Not the lock itself? That's right, sir. I've prepared an audio file and sent it to your screen. I'm sure you'll want to listen for yourself. Yes, I will. Get back to your station, Bernstein. Tick-tock, people. What do we have on Drummond? The analyst who'd replayed the video said, Sir, Nicholas Drummond, grandson of the eighth Baron de Vesci, currently an FBI special agent, moved to New York last month after terminating his employment with the Metropolitan Police of London. He is former Foreign Office, and his father, Harold Mycroft Drummond, is currently listed as a consultant to the British Home Office. Pull his file. Yes, sir, I'm accessing the Home Office files now. Another analyst said, Sir, Drummond had one marriage, ended in divorce. He's highly trained and lethal with a variety of weapons, and he's a serious hacker. The man swallowed. He was a field agent for a while, mainly in Afghanistan, but like I said, he's a serious hacker, sir, excellent, in fact, and that's why the Foreign Office wanted him. He was responsible for the underlying code of Mackay, similar to Stuxnet, the virus used to shut down the Iranian nuclear arsenal in 2010. Mrz didn't miss the note of awe in the analyst's tone. He said, I thought that job was done by Mossad. Apparently they used Drummond as a decoy, sir. He was the one who wrote the original program, fed it to the Israelis. They took his Mackay variables and created Stuxnet. But he left soon after, there's no reason listed. Moved to New Scotland Yard as a homicide investigator. Drummond's personnel file from the Metropolitan Police lists a multitude of successes; he had an excellent close rate, and several write-ups for insubordination. Another analyst called out, Sir, he's the one who recovered the Koh-i-Noor diamond a few months ago. He went rogue with the female special agent, Michaela Caine. You'll remember they recovered the stone. Mrz smiled and the young man shuddered. Went rogue, did he? Keep digging. In the meantime, I will inform Mr. Havelock of the situation we find ourselves in. He will not be well pleased by the news that both Pearce and Mr. X are dead. Bernstein, find a way to destroy any evidence of his internal surveillance capabilities before the Americans find them. Both Mrz and Bernstein knew this was impossible that Mr. X's implant would most likely be discovered in autopsy. Their only hope now was that the autopsy wouldn't be done today, that it wouldn't be thorough, but the chances were slim on both counts. And then the FBI would have the nanotechnology implant. And Havelock would have all their heads. Mrz stepped from the room, seeing the images of Mr. X running like a madman, then caught and brought down. Losing Mr. X so close to the end meant there would be repercussions, bad ones. At least they still had Mr. Z in play. Since this was Mrz's operation, he must take responsibility. No choice. Slowly, he raised his hand and knocked on the door to Mr. Havelock's office, and entered without waiting for a reply. 7Dr. Manfred Havelock stared out the huge plate-glass window, looking at the Berlin spring afternoon. People crowded the sidewalks, bicycles parked in rows

outside the red-umbrellaed sidewalk cafs of the Kreuzberg, so much traffic, so many people, yet there were scores of horse chestnut trees and ivy climbed up the buildings, beautiful and green, right in the heart of the city. He lived here in the X-Berg, enjoying his anonymous life among the socially conscious Germans and the unwanted immigrants, the hip-hop culture and the gays, because no one would expect it. He was forty-seven and easily one of the richest men in Germany, if not in all of Europe. He was a success in all ways imaginable. He smiled, thinking of his global multinational nano-biotechnology firm, and the respect given him by his peers. Truth be told, though, he most enjoyed the fear of his enemies. He watched a boy and girl leaning across a caf table below to kiss, like in Paris, he thought, a place he could easily live. Would he move with the rich and powerful? Honestly, he found them a boring lot, toadies, sycophants, but still, to have his boots licked was pleasant on occasion. But only on occasion. He loved the X-Berg, it was where he belonged. Its darkened corners allowed him to indulge in whatever behavior he wanted, no matter how reckless, how profligate. On the streets he was known only as the man who preferred the most esoteric acts available, and paid well for them. Ah, but there was more, so much more. No one knew who he really was, no one knew who lived among them, and what he was capable of. What he could do to them, if he wished. If they knew, they would not go so easily through their days and nights. Havelock turned to see Elise step forward from the shadows. Her black hair, loose, as he liked it, cascaded to her waist. He himself had selected the skintight black catsuit she wore, a fit so tight it drove him mad with lust, even more than if he had seen her naked. Ah, and those five-inch stiletto heels on her long, narrow feet, perfect, as was the diamond-and-jet choker he had fastened around her beautiful throat three years before when he had selected her for himself and brought her into his world. He waved toward the window. Is it not ironic, my dear? The way they move without knowing how precarious their lives are? How in a blink he snapped his fingers I can take it all away from them? Make them cry and scream if I wished? Make them dead and nothing at all? Her voice was low, deep, as he had taught her to speak. Her soft rose scent filled his nostrils. It is, Manfred, very ironic. She came to stand by him, smiled directly into his eyes as she took his hand, caressed his palm, and began to press hard and harder still until his eyes went wild and he cried out. She released him, still smiling. Once the pain fell away, he said, Thank you, Elise. Well done, just as I taught you. But now we must think of other things. My plan is under way. Let us have a drink, to celebrate. She walked to the opulent walnut bar in the corner of the room and fixed him two fingers of Lagavulin, dropped onto two perfectly square ice cubes. He studied her as she walked back to him, her stilettos the only sound, and felt intense pleasure at seeing her shake her head in a practiced move that made her hair spill around her shoulders, soft, beautiful thick hair. He felt greed and hunger, hunger so intense it was naked in its force. He took the glass from her, feeling the brush of her fingers. It took all his willpower not to throw the drink on the floor and run his hands over her body, feel the tightness, know there was softness and strength beneath the catsuit. Elise saw the mad lust in his eyes and shifted her hips, offering, should he choose to have her again so soon, but he shook his head and looked out onto the pulsing streets of Berlin, sipping the scotch. Still, he tightened all over thinking about the bruises she had given him only an hour ago. But there was a time for indulgence, and a time for focus, and so he shook his head, pointed toward the discreet door, and Elise melted away into the darkness with no hesitation, saying nothing at all, a faint smile on her mouth. He truly wanted her, but not yet. Knowing she waited for her summons to come to him again helped. He took another sip of the scotch to steady himself. His time had come at last. All the years of waiting, sitting by while his father was in charge, were finished. It was his time now. He frowned. There were so many operations, too many opportunities for failure, and he had to admit it, he had been careless lately, indulging too much, losing himself for hours at a time in Elise's capable hands. He must keep focused, there was too much at stake. With focus and quiet comes clarity. Odd that his father had taught him that valuable lesson; indeed, he could hear his father's voice suddenly, he froze. He knew, knew something was wrong, terribly wrong. He turned in the next moment when Mrz entered quietly, shutting the door behind him. His face, as always, was blank, no clue to his thoughts, and, as always, Havelock felt revulsion at that long scar bisecting the shiny, stretched flesh, more a death mask than a man's face. Mrz was deadly, uncompromising, and brutal, and he was Havelock's. He owned him. He had come to believe Mrz was his perfect complement. But Havelock had learned over the years that when Mrz's icy blue eyes were narrowed, something was terribly wrong, and fury was bubbling, ready to kill, to destroy. Mrz said only, Mr. X is down, sir. Tell me, Havelock said, his voice perfectly controlled. His gel pack was activated. As far as we can tell, it was an accident. An accident, Havelock repeated, and Mrz, hating himself for it, knew deep grinding fear. Before the gel pack was accidentally activated, did Mr. X manage to retrieve the package from Pearce? No, sir. He was being taken into custody

when the incident occurred. Havelock shut his eyes and turned to face the windows again. And the prototype? Mrz kept his voice clear and calm. It is possible the American FBI are in possession of the prototype, sir. We are endeavoring to intercept and remove it from their hands before they are able to study it, but there is little chance. Actually, there was no chance at all and both of them knew it. I see. Were you able to tap into the Messengers systems before Mr. Xs untimely demise? Mrz hated his fear, wondered briefly if Havelock would quickly slide his favored Spanish stiletto into his neck. Yes, but we were not able to upload Mr. Pearces data before Mr. X was killed. Havelock felt such rage he wanted to kill all of them. Without Mr. X finishing his part of the mission, hooking into Jonathan Pearces computer for Havelocks remote access, they couldnt retrieve the coordinates for the lost sub, and time was running out. Havelocks voice went deadly quiet. First Mr. X kills Pearce, against my orders, then he gets himself dead? Better for him, perhaps, but not for you. Youre lucky Mr. Z is still functioning as he should. You will fix this, Mrz. We cant afford to have the plan derailed. Nor can the Order realize we are behind it or there will be problems, huge problems, that could destroy everything. Find a way to retrieve the information from Pearces computer before the FBI find it. Yes, sir. There is another route to the files, sir, though it involves a human asset. Havelock waved a hand. I dont care what you have to do. Understood. Also, it turns out we were incorrect earlier about what Pearce said as he died. What he actually said was The key is in the lock, not simply The key is the lock. Does that make any sense to you? Havelock took a sip of scotch. I will think about it. Pearce was fond of riddles. Im sure this is yet another of his trying games. We may have another problem, sir. Havelock met his lieutenants eyes, and Mrz flinched, knowing the deadly sarcasm was coming. More problems, Mrz? Am I not paying you enough? Providing you with the proper tools? Are you incapable of running the most simple of missions without cocking it up? No, sir. Not at all. This is about the FBI agent who responded to Pearces murder, and was responsible for Mr. X falling in battle. His name is Nicholas Drummond. Havelock slowly set his scotch glass on his desk. I dont suppose you know who that is? Yes, sir. He is former Foreign Office, then he went to You idiot, I dont care about his rsum. Drummonds the one who tracked the Fox across Europe and retrieved the Koh-i-Noor in three days. He brought down Saleem Lanighan. Lanighan was a tough son of a bitch, too, and now hes in a nuthouse in Paris, they say hell never have his brain back. And Drummonds father has the ears of all the British government. Do you understand, Mrz, Drummond is very high in the government? He banged his fist on the desk, making the scotch splash up over the edge of the crystal glass. These are not men to be trifled with, Mrz. They will eat us whole if given the chance. The Drummonds must not be allowed to interfere in our plans. If you want me to have Drummond eliminated, I will arrange it. It would not be difficult. Havelock calmed, narrowed his eyes at Mrz. Youre wrong. It would take more than Mr. X or Mr. Z to take down Nicholas Drummond. He is dangerous, and unpredictable. I would take great pleasure doing it myself, and Im the only one who could, truly, but I cant be under any sort of suspicion, not if the Order are going to accept me into their fold. No, leave Drummond alone for the time being. But watch him, Mrz. Watch every move he makes, keep him off the scent. If he gets close, then you deploy. Do you understand me? Deploy, sir? You mean deploy the micronuclear weapon? But the MNW has not left the testing grounds. We do not know if it is traceable. Nor do we know what the fallout will be. It could be worse than we anticipate. We do not know. All Havelock had to do was shake his head, only a small movement, but Mrz was instantly quiet. I do not recall asking your opinion, Mrz. Besides, we are past that point. Now that Pearces son has found the submarine, we must move quickly before others find out. The moment you access the coordinates from Pearces computer, we will leave and retrieve the key. Understand me, Mrz. If we have to use an MNW on Drummond, we will. Once we have the key and the weapon and adapt it to my MNWs, it wont matter, we will then be invincible. The Order wont be able to do a thing to stop us. Do you know, my father told me about the kaisers private treasury of gold that was also supposed to be aboard the submarine along with the key? If true, which I doubt, the gold would be a nice bonus. Now, gather all the micronuclear weapons for possible deployment. Mrz nodded slowly. If he felt doubts, they didnt show on his face. It will be done, sir. Will there be anything else? Revue de presse Praise for The Lost Key A thriller packed with nonstop action, real-life name-dropping and enough cutting-edge science to make you wonder how much of it could be true. Kirkus s This engaging and suspenseful thriller will entertain readers with impossible nail-biting situations that are resolved by ingenious means.... James Bond fans and readers who like heart-stopping action, cutting-edge science, and technology puzzles are bound to reserve this title. Library Journal (starred review) [A] compelling thriller. Associated Press Action-packed... Readers will be terrified and on the edge of their seats throughout the book. Crimespreem Magazine The authors sophisticated third-person narration smoothly propels

the action to the exciting climax. Publishers Weekly A fast-moving technothriller that proves the collaboration of Coulter and Ellison to be a serendipitous one. Booklist A thrill ride worthy of two such great writers. Suspense Magazine