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An Eye For An Eye: Matthew Richter Thriller Series Book #2

Excerpt

Prologue

As he made his way through the cantina, Pablo Guerrero could hear the cries of the crowd, calling for blood. He tugged at the cap, pulling it low over his face. Dressed as he was in a laborer's clothes, and not the designer fashions he'd grown accustomed to, he wasn't recognized.

Stepping out the back door, he threaded his way through the crowd to the side of the ring. He caught the eye of the boy standing in the middle. The boy, no more than thirteen, nodded briefly then held the black rooster up for the judge to inspect. After checking for injuries, the judge held out his hand and the boy handed him the one-inch curved blade. The judge inspected this, first looking then sniffing for the tell-tale signs of poison. Although he didn't detect any, he wiped the blade with a lemon—a long-standing practice to guard against cheating. Satisfied, the judge tied the blade onto the rooster's leg then stepped back.

The boy moved to the center of the ring, thrusting the bird in front of him, letting him see his opponent. Across from him, an old man holding a white rooster did the same. Guerrero watched as his rooster twisted and writhed in the boy's hands, clucking and hissing, anxious to fight. A slight grin crossed his face then disappeared. The judge signaled; the boy and the old man retreated to opposite sides of the pit.

The judge eyed the crowd and called out once more, "Apuestas!" *Bets.*

Guerrero signaled and handed the judge one hundred pesos, nodding in the boy's direction.

"El negro." *The black one.*

The judge nodded, held the hundred pesos in the air and called out to the crowd again. When all bets were placed, he signaled to the boy and the old man. They stepped forward again, thrusting their roosters at each other several times as the noise grew. The spectators, those wagering and those just watching, began to shout and chant, excited by the imminent battle. The judge called out again, and the roosters were placed on the ground. Like prize fighters, they danced around each other for a second or two before the black rooster charged. Wings flapping, the birds pecked at each other, clawing and fighting as they'd been trained.

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The black rooster jumped, fluttered a foot above the ground for a moment, and then dove at his opponent. The white rooster turned, swung his right claw out. As the chants and calls rose to a din, the black rooster crumpled to the ground.

For a second, Guerrero didn't move. Then he glanced at the old man holding the white rooster aloft, smiling, triumphant. He looked at his own bird lying in the dirt, the dark stains of blood appearing almost as black as the feathers. Guerrero stared at the old man again; his eyes dark. As he turned to leave, he caught the boy's eyes once more and nodded.

The old man would be found three days later, the dismembered white rooster sitting on top of his brutally beaten body.

Chapter One

Matthew Richter adjusted his radio wand and headset then glanced back at his team: eight heavily armed men, all wearing helmets and Kevlar vests and dressed in black tactical gear. He held up a thumb and nodded, receiving eight thumbs-up in reply. Opening the back door of the armored truck, he jumped to the ground and ran across the dark alley and then down the steep steps to the basement. When the last agent's head disappeared, a tenth agent, dressed in the uniform of an armored delivery guard, closed the cellar hatch in the sidewalk then climbed back in the rear of the truck. Seconds later, the truck pulled out of the alley. The insertion had taken less than twenty seconds.

Richter switched on his flashlight and made his way through the maze of pipes, past the furnace and up the stairway, his rubber-soled boots silent on the metal steps. At the top, he stopped and glanced back at his men, counting heads. Satisfied, he tapped his knuckles on the door once and it was opened immediately by another agent, dressed in the overalls of a janitor. The janitor led them down the hall to a door on the other side of the building where they stopped.

"We're just getting the audio feed online," the janitor whispered.

Richter nodded then glanced back at his team again, noting the hard eyes behind the tactical goggles, the tight muscles stretched across clenched jaws. They were ready. He switched his radio to the command net and his earbud hissed slightly. He cupped his hand over his ear to catch the conversation.

"...one million dollars. But we have some conditions."

Richter heard a grunt then: "There are always conditions."

There was a pause and then some scraping noises. "It has to be on December Twenty-fifth. He'll be in New York that day."

"How do you know that?"

Richter heard a sigh, then, "Please. We have our sources."

There was another pause, more scraping noises. "It has to be public?"

"Yes."

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“That increases the risk significantly.”

More scraping, another sigh. “How much?”

“Two million.”

Richter heard some whispering, some words in Spanish that he didn’t understand.

“Okay. Two million.”

“What about the family?”

“They’re unimportant. But if they get in the way, so be it.”

“Okay. I think we have a deal. But just to be clear...you try to fuck me over, you know I’ll hunt you down.”

A second later, there was a click, and then Richter heard a much clearer voice in his earbud.

“Green Light! Green Light! Green Light!”

As the janitor opened the door to the alley, Richter switched his radio back to the assault net. Then he stuck his head out, glanced once in each direction before dashing across the alley. Crouched in the darkness behind the dumpster, he did another headcount then held up three fingers and pointed to his right. In a half crouch, three men moved down the alley along the brick wall to the back of the building. He held three fingers up again then pointed to his left. Another three agents moved silently toward the front. Two men remained with him.

When the teams were in position, he turned and nodded to the three men crouched at the back corner of the building. He got a nod in reply. A second later, he got another from the three men in front.

“Go! Go! Go!” he hissed as he jumped up and ran to the side door, stepping out of the way of the agent on his heels. The man behind stepped up to the door, holding the Stinger ready. A second later there was a bright flash from the rear of the building followed by a loud bang. The agent swung the thirty-five pound steel battering ram at the metal door. It only took two strikes and the door flew open.

“Police!” Richter shouted as he sprang across the threshold, his gun in both hands. He darted to the left. A second agent followed, darting to the right. The third agent came last, a gun in his hand now, the battering ram discarded outside.

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There were shouts from the front and the rear of the building. After a quick glance around the room—empty except for shelves of ingredients and supplies for the bakery in front—Richter and the two agents ran to the door that led to the hallway. Two shots rang out as they burst into the hall. Seconds later, he and his team converged on the back room where three men were lying on the floor.

“Clear!” several agents called out simultaneously.

Richter’s eyes darted around the smoke-filled room then down to the men lying at his feet. Two dark-skinned men were writhing on the floor, hands cupped over their ears. He noticed blood seeping through one of the men’s fingers, the tell-tale signs of a burst eardrum, courtesy of the flash-bang grenade. His eyes moved to the third man, a tall sandy-haired thug with a chiseled jaw—the Russian. The Russian’s shirt was stained with blood, with more seeping onto the floor; his face was contorted in pain. One agent secured the Russian’s gun while another knelt down to check his wounds. The Russian glared at the agent and then up at Richter. A second later, the hint of a smile crossed his face. Richter felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up and reached for his web belt.

The Russian was quick. Despite his wounds, he sprang off the floor, knocking one agent over then lunging at another. Richter chopped once with his tactical baton, catching the Russian behind the ear. He crumpled to the ground.

Richter and one of his men exchanged a look. The agent nodded then placed his foot on the Russian’s head, holding him down, while another agent cuffed him. Richter glanced around the room, did a quick headcount again. All of his men were accounted for, all uninjured; all except, he noticed, for the pride of the agent who had been knocked over.

Richter pulled the microphone wand closer to his mouth.

“Three tangos secure. Two with minor injuries, one wounded and unconscious. Request an ambulance.”

“Copy Blue Lead. Three tangos secure. Ambulance on its way.”

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