

Raven's Redemption: A Cybertech Thriller

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to our Veterans, Christians, and Local Law Enforcement. May God bless them all, and may God Bless America.

Our Vets are being treated shamefully. At present, they make up 40% of the homeless. One third of those waiting for VA care have died, and this at a time when we give free healthcare to illegals. *Every day 22 of our Vets commit suicide – one every 65 minutes.*

Obama's "Arab Spring" resulted in an Islamic Winter. The barbarous radical Islam of 1,000 years ago is back. Migration *jihad* – "*Hijrah*" – has flooded the world with more refugees than any time in history.

Largely unnoticed in this bloodbath is that what started as oppression of Christians has gone from persecution to slaughter. It is now approaching genocide, with world and religious leaders as silent about it as they were in the 1930s. It is here too, in America. From Roseburg to San Bernardino, *ihadists* are targeting Christians.

Progressives and Communists (see <http://revcom.us>) now target police, the Thin Blue Line that protects us. "Kill the Pigs" from the Bill Ayers 1960s is back, and this time with the DOJ assisting.

I also dedicate this book to my wife Pat. Without her patience and understanding, this book would not exist. She is a saint.

The *Raven's* series has been a wild ride. The harsh reality of the shameful "Iran deal" – which prevails, though **opposed** by most of Congress and 71% of the public – crashed into my novels and disrupted our lives.

Acknowledgements

Ernest Hemingway said, "There is no such thing as writing, only rewriting." He also said, "You never finish a book, you just let it go." He was right.

I could not write at the level I do without my critical readers, content experts, and editors who take the time to scan my drafts with eagle eyes, amazing insight, and brutally honest criticism. Each time they touch my words, my novels get better. Kay Jewett deserves special credit.

My novels bring me into contact with exceptional people who have sacrificed to keep America safe from our enemies both foreign and domestic. You know who you are. I honor your service and I am inspired by your personal stories.

The story line of my *Raven's* novels is coming true: *terrorists with nukes and long-range missiles*. The world is forever changed. I hope Americans are waking up.

Finally, you, my readers, are most important of all. Thank you for your support.

“To imagine a nuclear deal with Iran working is to imagine the Islamic Republic is without its revolutionary faith. So Mr. Obama’s deal making is in effect setting the necessary conditions for military action after January 2017.

Above all, the clerical regime cannot be understood without appreciating the centrality of anti-Americanism to its religious identity.”

Wall Street Journal
July 9, 2015, pg. A11

“No stronger retrograde force exists in the world. Far from being moribund, Mohammedanism is a militant and proselytizing faith. It has already spread throughout Central Africa, raising fearless warriors at every step; and were it not that Christianity is sheltered in the strong arms of science, the science against which it had vainly struggled, the civilization of modern Europe might fall, as fell the civilization of ancient Rome.”

Sir Winston Churchill, 1899

“The astonishing spread of Islam in its first century was due to the sword. There was a hiatus after the defeat at Vienna when Western technology made battle inadvisable. The nuclear weapon will be the great Equalizer, and allow *jihād* to proceed. The only option the West has to derail this juggernaut is to demonstrate that the Allah of Islam is powerless. That will be very difficult, since Islam has had so many successes in the recent decades.”

Private Source, 2015

“[Obama’s deal] doesn’t block Iran’s path to the bomb; it paves Iran’s path to the bomb.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Chapter 1 – Storms and Intruders

Present Day, Private Estate near Mendocino, California

The storm front arrived about six. Clouds rolled in, first purple, and then becoming inky black, roiling, whipped into tormented shapes, with edges as sharp as if carved by invisible knives. Wind howled, rain pounded down in torrents, thunder rolled, and jagged streamers of lightning strobed the sky. Raven huddled on the deck, sheltered by the overhang, watching huge waves pounding the rocks and shore, throwing spray and foam high over the cliffs.

Blinding flashes of actinic light were followed by deafening crashes of thunder. Lightning strikes were close and all around, coming so fast he could not count them. The thunderclaps merged into a constant roar. The flashes were too bright to look at directly.

Raven smelled ozone. He could taste it on the air, metallic and acrid on his tongue. A big fir exploded about fifty yards from the cabins. It did not burn. It shattered into hundreds of pieces, the debris instantly swept away by the winds. Ribbons of blue-white fire lashed the sea like laser beams.

There was no way he was going to walk the few hundred yards to the restaurant. Even if he made it, the power was out. *No hot food tonight.*

Raven struggled to his feet to go inside, leaning into the wind. He turned his gaze back towards the sea, only to catch a blast that would have humbled a thousand flashbulbs.

He closed his eyes tight and dropped to his knees, fingers interlaced, with his arms sheltering his head and covering his ears, backing into the most sheltered location he could find, the upwind corner formed by the building and the privacy wall that edged the deck.

He felt the rolling thunder through his entire body, and did his best to curl himself into a ball. Time passed. When the afterimages faded from his vision, Raven crawled inside on his

hands and knees. The sound diminished only slightly when he latched the double-glazed sliding door.

Wow. He leaned against the couch for a time taking deep breaths, thankful for the shelter. When his heart stopped pounding, food and a cold beer came to mind.

Using his flashlight with the red lens, he prowled the kitchenette, coming up with a tin of sardines, Tillamook cheese, a box of crackers, and a six-pack of cold IPA. Raven settled down on the couch facing the slider to the deck, watched the storm, and remembered.

The IPA brought back memories. On his last mission, the Brits had introduced him to India Pale Ale. They said it dated back to the 19th century and Queen Victoria. He sat there pondering his last mission, sipping the hoppy, slightly bitter brew, thinking of a small, gentle woman with soft eyes and long brown hair. She had been a casualty and it was his fault.

Josie was a national treasure, a woman with unique talents. In a different time, long ago, she had been a pagan high priestess. The few in Washington who knew of her existence called her a remote viewer, a paranormal, but that was if they spoke of her at all, a rare event which could occur only at the highest security levels, in hushed tones, and on a need-to-know basis.

At the beginning that was all he and Josie had in common. Neither officially existed, neither could share their inner secrets, neither dared develop close relationships. Beyond that, they came from different worlds, lived in different universes.

Josie lived on a higher plane, a land of radiance and bright spirits. Raven prowled the deep dark of midnight. There he hunted monsters, part of a thin black line that sought to protect more peaceful souls.

They were forced together by necessity, both national and personal. Josie was tasked with providing high-value intelligence. Raven was to protect her so she could do the work. It grew to

be more than that. Alone against the world, the two bonded, first as associates, then as a team, then as friends, and finally as lovers and mates.

For Raven, it was the closest thing to living he had ever known. Sharing. Trust. He always woke up thinking about Josie, her gentle spirit, love, and paranormal powers of perception.

And of how he'd almost destroyed her. Mostly, he thought of that.

When terrorist assassins came, he had been badly wounded, and she had been forced to kill. It had damaged her mind. That he was responsible, even if by accident, broke his heart.

He kept missing Josie, revisiting what went wrong and how much of it was his fault. They said she was catatonic, being tended in some high-security medical unit. He was not allowed to see her, but the experts assured him she would be fine... in time.

Raven had doubts.

He remembered the old Spielberg movie. Experts said the same about ET, the funny-looking little alien with psychic powers who was rescued by children who took it home. Shit happened, government came to help, and ET wound up in a plastic bubble, tended by clueless technicians in NASA space suits – who were unknowingly killing him.

That was the part of the movie that grabbed him, death by ignorance. ET far from home, dying accidentally because those treating him were acting in a realm beyond their limits of knowledge.

Raven did not like the movie and now Josie was living it. “Trust us,” they said. The more sincerely they said it, the more Raven was convinced they didn't have a freaking clue.

ET was resurrected by being who he was. Not by the government.

Raven opened the last bottle of IPA. He took a few sips. It didn't even taste good any

more. He pushed the bottle away.

Raven drew the thick curtains and rolled into bed. He put a pillow over his head, trying to silence the crashes of thunder. Time passed and the storm continued to rage. The incandescent flashes penetrating the gaps around the curtains were subliminally disturbing, even with his eyes shut.

He could feel his body tense with each flash; it reminded him of incoming artillery. The wind was shrieking and the entire building trembled in the heavy gusts.

He finally got up and duct-taped the curtains to the wall, stuffing towels in the gaps for good measure. It helped.

In addition to the pillow, Raven put a towel over his eyes. He rolled over facing the wall. That helped too. Eventually the thunder grew more distant and the room darkened. The gloom outside merged with the darkness in his soul, and sleep came.

When Raven woke, the first thing he noticed was the silence. He ripped the tape off, opened the curtains, and saw stars. He slid open the deck door, taking deep breaths. The air tasted clean, and, looking around, the buildings were missing shingles but remarkably intact.

There was debris strewn all over the lawn. Nothing was moving. The wildlife was still hunkered down, but there were a few lights showing. The power was back.

Raven tried to think positive. The shrinks wanted him to do that. *A new day. Life returns to normal.* That would be nice. The problem was he wasn't sure what normal was anymore. Whatever or wherever it was, he had not seen it for a long time.

Raven washed down two aspirin and started fixing a pot of coffee. He would have a cup with an energy bar, and start his workout when his head stopped throbbing.

Job #1 was to get well, be released, and go see Josie himself.

The small resident staff called it “the Ranch.” It was remote and rustic in the 1960s California style, nestled on the coast near the big Redwoods.

The siding was straight-grain Cedar, the roof of low pitch, covered with shakes, and the construction solid with massive roof beams. His unit was one story, tucked into the steep hillside, with most of its west wall consisting of the large sliding glass door leading to a sheltered deck overlooking the ocean and sweeping lawns far below.

In summer, you could leave the slider open to the cool breezes with full privacy. Hell, the lawn was over thirty feet down. Unless an assailant had special equipment, the only good approach was through the front door. It was solid wood with a pickproof latch and a bolt. It might not stop an intruder, but it sure as hell would slow him down.

The unit had been upgraded with a flat-screen TV fed by a satellite dish, a small bar, and a big soaking tub with ornate silver handles, but it lacked phone or Internet connections. The emphasis was on privacy, simplicity, comfort, and functional design. The Ranch was secure enough to be calming to recovering agents with ragged nerves, but without looking like a fortress and attracting undesirable attention.

From the soaking tub, you could open a screen and watch the ocean while still being shielded from the view of anyone on the grounds. The king-sized bed took up most of the main room, but there was a small couch in front of the river-rock, wood-burning fireplace next to the TV. Out on the deck, there were two wooden chairs and a small table to put drinks on, still there and intact even after the storm. The deck had a partial roof overhang and a waist-high privacy wall instead of an open railing.

The sliding door had two sets of window coverings: translucent blinds for privacy, and opaque blinds for darkness. Raven preferred leaving them open during daylight hours. He liked being able to see what was coming, and there was a telescope he could set up on the deck to watch passing fishing boats and ships.

The problem with doors and walls was that you didn't know what was on the other side.

The setting reminded Raven of the early James Bond movies. Once an elegant private resort at the dead end of a 2-lane road in disrepair, it had fallen on hard times and gone bankrupt during one of America's financial meltdowns. Somewhere along the way, it had come into government hands, probably through a series of shell companies.

The grounds were getting a bit overgrown – it helped conceal the sensors and security cameras, but the old resort still looked good. The 800 number still worked, but you got a recording saying the estate was in receivership and hoped to reopen next year. It took a five-digit code to interrupt it and leave a message for a callback. In reality, the Ranch was now used as a rehab facility for recovering deep-black operatives.

That is why Raven was there. Two 9-millimeter slugs in the chest, a bad attitude, and the need for seclusion to get his shit together made it the perfect place.

He was slouched in a chair on the deck of his cottage with his feet up on the small wooden table, sipping coffee, when he heard footsteps coming down the front walk. The path was steep down to his front door, alternating between wood planks, gravel, concrete, and steps. He had practiced identifying and locating the local sounds. Whoever it was had just come off the board planks, across the gravel, was now on the first concrete pad, and should be approaching the first set of steps.

A few seconds later, he heard the slight creak of the steps shifting under the load. If they

turned left to his unit, a raised walkway gave hollow echoes. A right turn led to solid concrete that produced less sound.

The person – there was only one set of footsteps – turned left. Whoever it was, they were coming toward him, maybe for him.

Raven frowned, pulling the small pistol out of the pocket of his robe. He extracted the silencer from his other pocket, screwing it on by feel, his attention on the door.

He had been uneasy of late. It was not the storm, not really. Something wasn't right. He could sense it. His mission sense kept kicking in. The world seemed just a little tilted.

Raven took a few deep breaths. *Don't worry about what you can't control. Worry about what you can, and be ready for the unexpected. Adapt. When an attack comes, deflect it and use the power to your advantage.*

The little SIG .45 ACP was cocked and locked, with a full magazine and one up the pipe. He slipped off his sandals, and catlike, moving freely, dashed across the room and positioned himself so as to be behind the door when it opened.

His body was coming back. He felt strong.

Raven paused and focused, controlling his breathing, listening intently. *What was different?* It was not the sound of the nurses' rubber soled white shoes. The sound was leather shoes with heels. It was not his doctor. Wyden walked with a limp.

There was a distinctive creak from the loose board. *Probably a male, vigorous and not too heavy, maybe 180 pounds. Dr. Wyden was overweight and moved slowly.*

The intruder was coming down the last two steps, the footsteps slower and softer. There was no knock. A key turned in the lock, the latch moved, and the door slowly opened.

A man stepped silently into the room, bald, wearing glasses, and dark clothing. He was

scanning the room, his back to Raven, his right hand on the doorknob, the other one empty.

He was an easy target. A hammer fist or an elbow slash, *Sok Tee*, to the side of the head would kill, a jump kick, *Gra-dode Teh*, to the kidneys would disable.

Instead, Raven took one long step forward and touched the gun barrel against the intruder's ear. The man stood totally still, frozen in place.

He's had training. This one is a pro. Raven reminded himself to be careful. He'd made enough mistakes for one lifetime.

"Hands up, slowly," Raven said. "Good. Now two steps forward, and face-down on the floor."

Without a sound, the man complied.

Raven kicked the door shut. The latch clicked. He leaned a chair against it, under the knob, and flipped on the lights.

"May I get up now? Or have you lost your fucking mind?"

Oh, Shit. Great way to get your boss' attention. Raven took a deep breath. He clicked the safety on and lowered his weapon. "Sorry."

He helped Goldfarb to his feet. "Why didn't you knock?"

Goldfarb glanced at the gun, now aimed at the floor.

Raven unscrewed the silencer. He pocketed it and the gun. "Predawn is a dangerous time. The last time I had intruders was not a happy one. People died."

"Most of them by your hand." Goldfarb was silent for a long moment. "You cause me concern. Your reactions are becoming unpredictable. Six weeks ago, I walked in here and you were unarmed, sitting with your back to the door, helpless as a kitten. I could have stuck an ice pick in the back of your head."

Raven looked Goldfarb up and down slowly. He smiled like a wolf. “Not this time....”

“True enough,” Goldfarb said. “The doctors say you’re recovering, but perhaps they’re mistaken? There doesn’t seem to be a lot of white space in your mind between sloppy and paranoid.”

“I didn’t like sloppy.”

“That’s encouraging. Why? ”

“If someone is going to get hurt, I’d prefer it not be me or my friends.”

“Quite right,” Goldfarb said musingly. He seemed to make a decision. When he spoke again, his voice was crisp and held an edge of command. “Now that you’ve scared the shit out of me, perhaps I could get some coffee before we talk.”

Raven led him out on the deck, gestured at the second chair, handed him a cup, and poured from the white carafe. “It should still be hot.”

Goldfarb eased himself down, took a sip, and nodded appreciation.

It was starting to get light outside. Colors were becoming richer, less muted, and Raven could hear the sounds of gulls looking for breakfast. He situated himself with his back against the wall where he could keep eye contact with Goldfarb and watch the sunrise on the water.

“I expected a mission briefing,” Raven said. “A month ago.”

“You weren’t ready.”

“How the *hell* would you know if I’m ready or not?”

“You’re out of line.”

“When I’m in the field, you’re my lifeline. When you stuck me here, you moved me off the board. You left me twisting in the wind. Are you my control or not?”

“I am. And you weren’t ready for a mission.”

“Exactly what gives you this divine insight?”

“My sources and methods are not your concern. Here’s what is: I take care of my people.”

“**Really?**” Raven did not try to keep the skepticism out of his voice.

“You’re safe here, and recovering. The same goes for Josie. I’m doing my job.”

Raven took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Let’s try this again, Doctor. What made you decide to drop in?”

“You beat Nai last week,” Goldfarb said.

Raven blinked. “What?”

“*Muay Thai*. You beat Nai. Is that true?”

“So?”

“I’ve never had anyone beat Nai. That’s why I hired him.”

Raven smiled thinly. It was as close to a compliment as you got from Goldfarb. “Not even the young, macho studs without bullet holes?”

“No.” Goldfarb seemed to relax slightly. “How is your rehabilitation going?”

“Good. It’s going good.”

It was. He needed to stay busy, to do positive things. Each day, he would go to the gym and work the machines and weights, followed by aerobics: a run along the cliffs, down to the beach, and back.

“Back” was a bitch. Nine hundred and thirty feet up a steep dirt path, followed by a mile run back across the grounds. When he started, he could barely walk that 930 vertical, having to look for rocks to lean on and branches to hang onto. He could do it at a run now, and each day he got stronger.

After that, Raven would enjoy his shower and have a solid, high-protein breakfast: three eggs, ham, and a fresh biscuit with the excellent local honey. Three days a week, he would go down to the dojo mat where they had provided instructors to refresh his unarmed combat skills. Raven was studying Muay Thai, an unusually lethal martial arts form.

Muay Thai had an arsenal of nine weapons – the head, fists, elbows, knees, and feet. Attacks could come from any direction, and with bewildering rapidity. Even defense was violent. Since one hit could put an opponent out of action, defense keyed on small, precise motion to return to the guard quickly with minimum energy expenditure. Advanced techniques were usually counters, used to damage the opponent to prevent another attack being made.

Raven's instructor, Nai, had competed in Thailand and was damned good. At 22, he had been invited to the Royal Household to teach Muay Thai to the King's private security staff.

Nai kicked like a mule and had the speed of a panther. Raven had never seen anyone with so much quick. Nai pulled his blows, but missing a block, redirection, or evasion was still bad news. Even with Thai pads and focus mitts, the impacts hurt like hell.

The brutal physical combat kept Raven's mind fully occupied. Each session ended with four intense five-minute rounds with short rest periods between. Raven was getting better – he was fighting to draws in the early rounds, and, yeah, he even won one last week – but Nai kept the pressure on. He said the pros sparred every day.

The regimen kept Raven from thinking about Josie and how he'd let her down. It was also helping to hone his senses. He welcomed the conflict.

“I take care of my people,” Goldfarb said softly. “If you can't trust me, we shouldn't be working together.”

“I'm sorry,” Raven said.

Goldfarb's eyes widened slightly. "Excuse me?"

"I said I was sorry. I apologize."

"The last time I saw you, you were in bad shape. Right?"

"Yeah. I was."

"You wanted to run off half-cocked to avenge the girl."

"Maybe."

"That was stupid. I need you to focus on the mission and to be able to perform. I need you to act like a professional. The Agency called you Cowboy. That shit doesn't cut it with me."

"Can we move on now? I don't work for the Agency anymore."

"True. You work for me, and I need to know if you deem yourself to be mission capable.

Are you up to another run?"

"What about Josie?"

"You'll see her."

Raven frowned.

"You're fit for a mission. I want you to bring her in. She's irreplaceable."

"She is that, Sir, but I don't understand. Why don't you just issue orders to have her released?"

"Do you want me to paint a target on her forehead? Our own bureaucracies would put her at extreme risk. The doctors will not release her without specific written orders to override their opinions and rules, which would then become a matter of record. The ObamaCare protocols will make these records available to our enemies, both foreign and domestic."

"How so?"

"The ObamaCare core is a shared database run by the IRS that contains everyone's

medical, personal, financial, and tax records. The security of all this information is highly suspect. Even if these records are not hacked by enemy states, seven or eight Federal bureaucracies share them. Tens of thousands of people have access. It is beyond comprehension to imagine such a database would be secure. Would you like to have your records there?"

"Of course not."

"Me either, and Josie is more of a high value target than either of us. She is there under false name, a legend. If they tracked it, it would lead nowhere, but that in and of itself would raise red flags. You need to make a covert extraction without leaving any fingerprints on it that could lead back to the intelligence community or the office of the President.

"I want you in and out like a ghost. I need her to vanish without alerting anyone or leaving any paper trail."

"An interesting notion. Did you come to brief me about how we are going to do this?"

"I came to confer with you. It is not that simple. There are some problems."

There always were. "I'm listening."