Fallout (Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell)



By David Michaels



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A radical Islamic leader who dreams of the past will do anything in his power to ensure that the future is destroyed-by hitting the technological world where it hurts: oil.

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Editorial Review

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To all the loyal "Fisherists" skulking about out there.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While I've said it before, it bears repeating: The author is but the "face" of a book. The heart, muscles, and oftentimes the brains of a book work behind the scenes, unseen, and too often unacknowledged.

Thanks to the following for helping make Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Fallout the great book it is:

Tom Colgan, Sandy Harding, and everyone else at The Berkley Publishing Group. Thanks for making me look good.

Michael Ovitz and Chris George. Thanks for your confidence.

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Pam Ahearn. Thanks for your support and dedication. You're the best, Pam.

Tom Clancy, without whom Splinter Cell wouldn't exist.

And, of course, my wife. I'm glad you're in my life.

2008—SAN FRANCISCO

FISHER knew he was being followed. He knew it by the obvious signs, of course, but he also felt it in his gut. What he didn't know was how many there were and when they would make their move. He'd already picked up the package right under their noses, so they certainly weren't going to let him reach the drop-off. But how close would they let him get?

He stopped before the window of a watch shop and stood admiring the newest Tissots on display. From the corner of his eye, he saw the man he'd named Tail 6.1 (one watcher on his six o'clock position) also stop before a window to study the merchandise. The man was good; as Fisher watched, the man pulled out his cell phone, dialed, then said after a moment, "No, I'm looking at it right now . . . yeah, the exact one you've been looking for . . ."

A good tail personalizes his or her cover, Fisher reminded himself. Without that, a watcher tends to carry a "pursuit aura" that anyone with even the most rudimentary countersurveillance training would pick up on.

"... no, the one on Franklin Street ... right. Okay, bye."

Walking fifty feet behind Tail 6.1, Tail 6.2.2 (two watchers together, a man and woman walking arm in arm, second position behind the first tail), passed their compatriot at the shop window and kept walking, passing Fisher a few seconds later and continuing down the sidewalk. Fisher mentally switched their designation to Tail 12.2—they were now in the lead tail position.

He'd been keeping this imaginary clock face in his head for the past two hours, moving the various pawns around as they changed positions and proximity to him. They were all very good, moving seamlessly as they kept a blanket of surveillance over him, all the while changing clothes and partners and demeanors in hopes of remaining invisible to him. It hadn't worked, but neither had he been able to lose them with the routine dry-cleaning tactics. The other factor: Did they know he'd made them? Probably not; if they did, they would've already taken him.

It would have been ridiculous—all these do-they-know-I-know machinations—if it hadn't been so deadly serious. They'd already come close to catching him in the act two weeks earlier; if it happened this time, he was done.

Fisher checked his watch. Another ten minutes was all he needed.

Ten minutes and one last attempt to lose them.

He turned from the shop window and continued down the sidewalk, but at a slower pace, letting the couple ahead of him gain some distance. The sidewalk and streets were moist with fog from the bay, and the mist swirled around the streetlights, rainbow-hued halos that seemed to shift and pulse as Fisher's path took him closer or farther from each one. In the distance he could hear the mournful gong of navigation buoys.

Ahead he could see the entrance to the alley, a darkened rectangle between two buildings. He'd chosen it the night before for a number of reasons: It sat equidistant between two streetlamps; its end was blocked by a tall hurricane fence topped with barbed wire; and, if he timed it correctly, his lead tails would round the corner ahead before he reached the alley entrance. And, once inside, to keep him in sight, one or more of the watchers would have to follow him in—probably the lone man on his tail. *So, ten seconds for him to reach the entrance, thirty more waiting to see if his target reemerged*, Fisher thought. With luck, he'd have forty seconds to do what he needed to do.

Keeping his eyes fixed on the couple ahead and his ears tuned to the click of heels on the sidewalk behind him, Fisher adjusted his pace, waiting, waiting . . . The couple ahead rounded the corner. Fisher drew even with the alley's entrance and continued for three more paces, then abruptly wheeled left and strode into the shadowed alley. Feeling the darkness envelop him, Fisher felt a wave of relief. For most of his career, he'd worked strictly in the shadows, and he'd come to think of them as his closest ally. Conversely, this cloak-and-dagger business was done mostly in plain sight. It was a different kind of game altogether. It had taken some getting used to.

On flat feet he sprinted halfway down the alley until he reached the darkened doorway to his left, then ducked into it. Just as he'd left it, the tin garbage can lid was propped against the brick wall. He snatched it up, tucked it between his legs, then reached above his head and snagged the lowermost rung of the building's fire escape. He chinned himself onto the grated catwalk above and then crab-walked to the right until he reached the first stairway and started upward. At the next landing, he grasped the garbage can lid like a Frisbee in his right hand, leaned over the railing, took aim, and hurled the lid. It sailed true, arcing down the alley. It slammed into the hurricane fence at the far end, bounced off the fencing with a twanging rattle, and crashed into the garbage cans against the wall.

Fisher was already moving, bounding silently up the fire escape ladder two steps at a time. He stopped, pressed his body against the wall, and listened. Below him he could hear heels clicking in the alley. He looked down. His lone tail, having heard the commotion, recognizing it for what it was, and assuming his target was making a run for it, had taken the bait.

The final piece of Fisher's ploy—a homeless man he'd paid \$100 to wait in the alley on the other side of the fence until he got his cue—now played his part and shuffled down the alley toward its opposite entrance.

Fisher heard a muttered "Damn," then saw his tail lift his jacket cuff to his lips: "Target on run . . . heading east toward Auburn . . ." The tail turned and sprinted from the alley.

Attaboy, Fisher thought and started a new timer in his head. Two minutes. No more.

Ten seconds after the tail disappeared around the corner, a blue van with a red and yellow Johnson & Sons Plumbing placard on its side raced past the alley's entrance and squealed around the corner. Fisher gave the van five more seconds, waiting until he no longer heard the engine, then climbed the final few steps to the fire escape's uppermost platform, then boosted himself onto the roof. It was gravel-covered, flat, and mostly featureless save for a few rusted ventilation chimneys and a lone, phone booth-sized access door in its center. In the distance he could see the twinkling lights of San Francisco's business district and beyond that, the navigation lights of cargo ships moving in the harbor.

Careful to not disturb the gravel, Fisher walked west across the roof, paralleling the sidewalk below until he reached the far edge. As had been the garbage can lid, the aluminum maintenance ladder he'd found here the day before was still in place, lying on its side, tucked against the eaves trough. Quietly he picked up the ladder and, holding it vertically before him, braced the clawed feet on the eaves, then grasped the pulley rope and began extending the ladder upward.

The rung supports clanged against the ladder's aluminum braces, echoing through the alley and the street below. Fisher winced inwardly but kept pulling. There was nothing to be done about the noise; it was necessary. Once the ladder had reached its full height, Fisher leaned backward for leverage and began lowering it across the gap to the next building. As the ladder passed the forty-five-degree angle, gravity took hold. Fisher strained to keep the ladder's twenty-four-foot length steady. Hand over hand, inches at a time, he continued until finally the aluminum supports banged against the opposite roof.

To his north he heard the squealing of tires followed by echoed shouts: "Stop right there! Don't move, don't move . . ."

Then silence. Thirty seconds passed. An engine revved again. Tires squealed.

Fisher allowed himself another smile. They're on to you, Sam.

Another half minute passed, and then Fisher heard what he assumed was the plumbing van race around the corner and slide to a stop before his escape alley. Fisher bent over, lifted the end of the ladder, and let it drop with a clang back onto the eaves. He then turned on his heel, walked to the roof's access door, and opened it an inch, leaving it ajar. Finally, he walked to the northern edge of the roof and dropped onto the fire escape below. As he reached the third-floor landing, he heard the rapid crunch of footsteps on the roof gravel.

"Here, here . . . that ladder . . ." a voice called.

Then a second voice: "Got an open door here . . ."

The crackle of radio static, then a third voice: "Units . . . command . . . regroup, back to the street . . ."

Fisher waited until he heard the footsteps running back over the gravel, then braced himself against the brick wall, took two quick steps, and leaped across the gap to the opposite building's balcony. He crouched down, slid open the window, crawled through into the empty apartment, and closed the window behind him.

Two minutes later he was out the building's front door and headed north.

HALF an hour later, he was sitting on a bench in Embarcadero Plaza overlooking the bay, eating a chunk of sour-dough bread, and sipping coffee when the Johnson & Sons Plumbing van pulled to a stop at the curb. The side door slid open, revealing four shadowed figures and a bank of monitors and communications equipment. A figure climbed down from the van, walked to Fisher, and stopped before him.

The woman Fisher knew as Jackie Fiest was wearing a blue sweatshirt embossed with a circa 1960s red female symbol. She smiled ruefully at him and shook her head. "You're an SOB, Fisher."

Fisher smiled back. "I assume that means I passed?"

"Passed? Sweetie, you just got done running a dozen of my best watchers in circles for the past two hours. What d'you think? Come on, get in, let's debrief."

2

ALATAU MOUNTAINS, KYRGYZSTAN-KAZAKHSTAN BORDER

THE warlords and their troops had been instructed to assemble in full battle gear shortly before dusk in the camp, a narrow mountain canyon surrounded by craggy, snowcapped peaks. Straddling the border as it did, the camp had for the last two years been the main headquarters for the resistance fighters. The puppet government in Bishkek had neither the resources nor the stomach to venture into the mountains and had

resigned itself to trying to block the various passes the resistance fighters used to sneak into the lowlands and wreak their havoc.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Clarence Guyer:

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