FREDERICK FORSYTH

THE DAY OF THE JACKAL

'A year-zero, game-changing thriller'
LEE CHILD

Praise for *The Day of the Jackal*

'In a class by itself. Unputdownable' *Sunday Times*

'As gripping now as it was 50 years ago' *The Times*

'Masterful suspense . . . *The Day of the Jackal* changed the shape of popular fiction from the moment it was finished'
Ben Macintyre

'Very clever and immensely entertaining'
Daily Telegraph

'A perfect example of the adventure story . . . well written, entirely believable, with this intriguing, enigmatic character at its centre'
Robert Harris

'A year-zero, game-changing thriller, one of the most significant of all time' Lee Child

'Wonderful and way ahead of its time'
James Patterson

'An extraordinary book' Nick Robinson, BBC Radio 4 *Today* Programme

'A masterpiece' Marcus Scriven, *Mail on Sunday*

'I was spellbound . . . riveted by this chilling story'
Guardian

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THE DAY OF THE JACKAL

Former RAF pilot and investigative journalist Frederick Forsyth defined the modern thriller when he wrote *The Day of the Jackal*, described by Lee Child as 'the book that broke the mould', with its lightning-paced storytelling, effortlessly cool reality and unique insider information. After that, he wrote thirteen novels which became bestsellers around the world: *The Odessa File*, *The Dogs of War*, *The Devil's Alternative*, *The Fourth Protocol*, *The Negotiator*, *The Deceiver*, *The Fist of God*, *Icon*, *Avenger*, *The Afghan*, *The Cobra*, *The Kill List* and *The Fox*. He also published his memoirs in *The Outsider*. Frederick Forsyth died in June 2025.

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ALSO BY FREDERICK FORSYTH

THE ODESSA FILE
THE DOGS OF WAR
THE DEVIL'S ALTERNATIVE
THE FOURTH PROTOCOL
THE NEGOTIATOR
THE DECEIVER
THE FIST OF GOD
ICON
THE PHANTOM OF MANHATTEN
AVENGER
THE AFGHAN
THE COBRA
THE KILL LIST
THE FOX

THE BIAFRA STORY
EMEKA
GREAT FLYING STORIES
NO COMEBACKS
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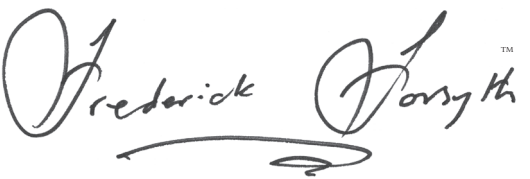
THE DAY OF THE JACKAL

Frederick Forsyth



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To my Mother and Father

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INTRODUCTION
BY LEE CHILD

This magnificent novel deserves better than an introduction that starts with a commonplace. That said: doesn't time fly? It's fifty years since this book came out. Then it felt luminously fresh and new. Now it's half a century old. But it *still* feels luminously fresh and new. How is that possible? I suppose that will be this introduction's penance for the opening: to figure out how a story about events already half-forgotten, and with no foundational suspense at all, became a year-zero, game-changing thriller, one of the most significant of all time, and one that still reads better than any of its numerous subsequent imitators.

Let's start in 1967, four years before this book came out. Viewed in retrospect from this great distance, 1967 looks like a hinge in history. Everything was changing. An old era was ending. It died that summer, at the end of *Sgt. Pepper*, with the long, fading piano chord. So much of that album was gently ironic or yearningly nostalgic about the old Britain, from Victoriana to grim 1950s suburbia, and to this listener anyway, the fading chord is the Beatles saying, *There you go, it's over now, we changed it for you*.

Not all the changes were fun. The pound was devalued that autumn, by fourteen per cent. Nowadays such a swing would flash amber for a second in a City trading room, but no one else would notice. Back then it was a huge national humiliation. Taken with the cultural changes everywhere apparent, it became startlingly clear that the old order was slipping away. The post-war era was shifting. No longer could Britain just look back at the war, as they were and battered but triumphant

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victor. Now it had to look ahead to the future, as . . . what exactly? No one really knew.

At the beginning of 1967, a young BBC journalist went to Africa to cover the civil war between Nigeria and Biafra. Journalism in 1967 was a mixed bag. Fleet Street still suffered from plenty of 'Lunchtime O'Booze' indolence and corruption, but equally a new strand of determined investigation was emerging, typified by Harold Evans' 1967 appointment to the editor's chair at the *Sunday Times*. Thereafter polite requests from government to look away from certain issues were ignored, and more serious legal perils were bravely faced. Broadcast journalism – with a fresher start – was equally or even more adventurous, especially at Granada TV's *World In Action*.

But the BBC was in an awkward spot. It was changing fast: BBC2 began regular colour broadcasts in 1967, and very significantly that year the corporation was forced to abandon its old wireless networks – the Home Service, the Light Programme, and the Third Programme – in favour of the giddily new Radio 1, 2, 3 and 4. The change came because of pirate radio ships moored close offshore, broadcasting what people actually wanted to hear. Thereby national policy was affected by uncontrollable and unstoppable transmissions coming in from beyond national borders – the first eerie pre-echo of our modern internet era. A hinge in history indeed.

But at that point the BBC had been in business more than forty years. Its state funding and its long involvement in national affairs had given it a quasi-constitutional status. It was hard to untangle the old and the new. Accordingly our young journalist covered the African war, and at the end of his six-month stint wanted to stay, because the story was worth it. *Oh no, dear boy*, he was told. *Post-colonialism is embarrassing to us as a nation. We're going to focus on Vietnam instead, and embarrass the Yanks for once*. It was news management at its worst. It was the abandonment of professional obligation in favour of face-saving.

What did our young journalist do about that? He was twenty-eight years old in 1967, at a time when the average age of the UK population was twenty-seven, because of the post-war baby boom. If 1967 was a hinge in history, it was only

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because those people wanted it to be. Changes don't happen unprompted. Our young journalist was right there at the centre of gravity of the new national mood. He was one of a particular part-generation, born immediately pre-war, subsequently subject to post-war National Service when it still meant something – he flew jet fighters at age nineteen – and thereafter restless, footloose, and impatient with nonsense. What would happen when the old Britain told that new Briton no?

The new Briton did what 1967 mandated. He declined his producer's crusty, old-boy's-network suggestion (possibly impolitely) and promptly resigned from the BBC. He struck out on his own and went back to Africa as a freelance. He stayed two more years, and catalogued the human drama, upheaval and misery in a book titled *The Biafra Story*. Unfortunately it didn't sell well. Thus as 1969 ended and 1970 dawned, our young journalist, now thirty-one, found himself broke and out of work. And like broke and out-of-work folks everywhere (me included) he decided to sit down and write a thriller, to make some money before he decided what came next.

Our young journalist was, of course, Frederick Forsyth. His beat before Biafra had been Paris, as a foreign correspondent for Reuters. Charles de Gaulle was then president of France, and had granted independence to Algeria, after a brutal and exhausting eight-year war. The move infuriated militant anti-decolonialists, who vowed to assassinate de Gaulle as just retribution. And they tried to, six times. Forsyth covered the most serious such attempt, up close and personal on a grand Paris boulevard, amid the shot-up wreckage of de Gaulle's motorcade. De Gaulle survived, as he did every time, because, Forsyth concluded, the vicious and far-reaching French secret service had all the militants under constant close surveillance. Therefore Forsyth further concluded that the only way for the militants to hit their target would be to hire an independent foreign assassin as yet completely unknown to the French authorities. He mused on the idea for a minute, before changing beats and moving on.

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The notion came back to him almost seven years later. Legend has it Forsyth wrote *The Day of the Jackal* in less than six weeks, in January and February 1970, at a rate of 4,000 words a day, every day, for a total of 140,000. Good going, but the completed manuscript immediately ran into the same objections we marvel at today. At first glance the story seemed to ask the basic question: would the hired killer get de Gaulle or not? But … everyone already knew he hadn't. Everyone already knew de Gaulle was still alive and well, famous, prominent, and notably un-assassinated. Wouldn't that certain knowledge fatally short-circuit the essential suspense that thriller readers crave? And also … France … Algeria … wasn't it all rather far away and long ago?

But Forsyth believed in his book, as he should. He had done something new and different. Essentially he had investigated and reported on a made-up story, with exactly the same meticulous professional rigour he would have used on a real story. It was as if he had written an in-depth, insider-secret true-crime book, a few years after a famous event. Yes, he had taken liberties by inventing dialogue, like all writers have to in that situation, but otherwise he had catalogued the step-by-step-by-step progress of the assassin's long and complex preparations, and the resulting urgent and complex police investigation, and finally the breathless just-in-time denouement, all with convincing authenticity, as if it were all true.

As a result, the absence of an overarching suspense arc didn't matter. In fact it probably helped. A simple will-he-won't-he question would have been banal in comparison. Instead sharp focus was thrown on a hundred variants of the question *how?* How was the assassin planning to do it? How could he possibly be stopped? How could he miss?

The intricacy and intrigue of the meticulous techniques on both sides of the chase created a constant stream of tiny micro-suspenses that built a powerful narrative engine. This was a difficult book to put down. Not least because of the characters. All were memorable. Claude Lebel, the police commissioner tasked with solving the problem, was an early iteration of the new school of realism when it came to European detectives, a

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son of Simenon's Maigret, a cousin to Martin Beck, a father of many later emigrants to Scandinavia.

But of course it's the Jackal himself we're fascinated by. Forsyth doesn't try to make us like him. He's not a tragic rogue or a man with a reason. In fact we never know who or what he is. Forsyth presents him as a blank, rational, thinking machine. We have no reason to want him to succeed. But we do. Forsyth himself stays neutral. Ultimately he's writing about two men doing difficult jobs as well as they can. But he tempts us to choose. Some of us choose both, but most of us choose the Jackal alone. Another innovation. There have been memorable monsters and charismatic anti-heroes, but never before have so many readers so passionately supported a cipher.

Possibly the book's most curious quality is its timelessness. The story is firmly set in 1962. It would make no sense otherwise. Yet its bones are so eternal it feels permanently contemporary. That was proved very quickly, when the (very decent) film came out a couple of years after the book. The 1962 story was shot very faithfully and very effectively on location, in Paris and points further south – but with no attempt at all to hide the 1970s clothes and cars and phones and street furniture. No set dressing. It was a 1962 story taking place in 1972. It worked well.

As does rereading the 1971 book in 2021. Naturally the technological era will seem quaint to any reader younger than, say, me. But for a thriller, fifty years out of date is always better than twenty-five. There's an ugly-duckling phase, where superannuations feel like mistakes. At fifty, they feel charming. My favourite is when the Jackal and the bad guys discuss the fee. The Jackal makes the point that, if successful, the hue and cry would be so intense and prolonged he could never work again. He would need to have made enough from that one job to live comfortably for the rest of his days. Therefore he would need . . . half a million dollars. In 1962 that was a staggering sum. In 2021 it would buy a small house, furniture extra. But it doesn't matter. The book lives on two planes simultaneously – specific to its period, and also to any period at all.

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Because of the writing, of course. It's effortless, propulsive, immersive, and involving. And sly, to an extent. Forsyth knew what he was doing, and he knew he knew, from the first line onward. Consider: 'It is cold at six-forty in the morning of a March day in Paris, and seems even colder when a man is about to be executed by firing squad.' Forgive me for being geeky about thriller writing, but that line could have been written by Alistair MacLean. Then less than a page later, we're irresistibly and irrevocably in Forsyth's own world. All deliberate. He was saying: *Come with me, from how things used to be done in the past, to how they will be done in the future*. Ten thousand lines later, we're there. We're in the future. Thrillers were never the same again.

Lee Child,
April 2021

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PART ONE

Anatomy of a plot

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CHAPTER ONE

It is cold at six-forty in the morning of a March day in Paris, and seems even colder when a man is about to be executed by firing squad. At that hour on 11th March 1963, in the main courtyard of the Fort d'Ivry, a French Air Force colonel stood before a stake driven into the chilly gravel as his hands were bound behind the post, and stared with slowly diminishing disbelief at the squad of soldiers facing him twenty metres away.

A foot scuffed the grit, a tiny release from tension, as the blindfold was wrapped around the eyes of Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Marie Bastien-Thiry, blotting out the light for the last time. The mumbling of the priest was a helpless counterpoint to the crackling of twenty rifle bolts as the soldiers charged and cocked their carbines.

Beyond the walls a Berliet truck blared for a passage as some smaller vehicle crossed its path towards the centre of the city; the sound died away, masking the 'Take your aim' order from the officer in charge of the squad. The crash of rifle fire, when it came, caused no ripple on the surface of the waking city, other than to send a flutter of pigeons skywards for a few moments. The single 'whack' seconds later of the *coup-de-grâce* was lost in the rising din of traffic from beyond the walls.

The death of the officer, leader of a gang of Secret Army Organization killers who had sought to shoot the President of France, was to have been an end – an end to further attempts on the President's life. By a quirk of fate it marked a beginning, and to explain why it must first be necessary to explain why a riddled body came to hang from its ropes in the courtyard of the military prison outside Paris on that March morning . . .

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The sun had dropped at last behind the palace wall and long shadows rippled across the courtyard bringing a welcome relief. Even at seven in the evening of the hottest day of the year the temperature was still 23 degrees Centigrade. Across the sweltering city the Parisians piled querulous wives and yelling children into cars and trains to leave for the weekend in the country. It was 22nd August, 1962, the day a few men waiting beyond the city boundaries had decided that the President, General Charles de Gaulle, should die.

While the city's population prepared to flee the heat for the relative cool of the rivers and beaches the Cabinet meeting behind the ornate façade of the Elysée Palace, continued. Across the tan gravel of the front courtyard, now cooling in welcome shadow, sixteen black Citroën DS saloons were drawn up nose to tail, forming a circle round three-quarters of the area.

The drivers, lurking in the deepest shade close to the west wall where the shadows had arrived first, exchanged the inconsequential banter of those who spend most of their working days waiting on their masters' whims.

There was more desultory grumbling at the unusual length of the Cabinet's deliberations until a moment before 7.30 a chained and bemedalled usher appeared behind the plate-glass doors at the top of the six steps of the palace and gestured towards the guards. Among the drivers half-smoked Gaulloises were dropped and ground into the gravel. The security men and guards stiffened in their boxes beside the front gate and the massive iron grilles were swung open.

The chauffeurs were at the wheels of their limousines when the first group of Ministers appeared behind the plate glass. The usher opened the doors and the members of the Cabinet straggled down the steps exchanging a few last-minute pleasantries for a restful weekend. In order of precedence the saloons eased up to the base of the steps, the usher opened the rear door with a bow, the Ministers climbed into their respective cars and were driven away past the salutes of the Garde Républicaine and out into the Faubourg St Honoré.

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Within ten minutes they were gone. Two long black DS 19 Citroëns remained in the yard, and each slowly cruised to the base of the steps. The first, flying the pennant of the President of the French Republic, was driven by Francis Marroux, a police driver from the training and headquarters camp of the Gendarmerie Nationale at Satory. His silent temperament had kept him apart from the joking of the ministerial drivers in the courtyard; his ice-cold nerves and ability to drive fast and safely kept him De Gaulle's personal driver. Apart from Marroux the car was empty. Behind it the second DS 19 was also driven by a gendarme from Satory.

At 7.45 another group appeared behind the glass doors and again the men on the gravel stiffened to attention. Dressed in his habitual double-breasted charcoal-grey suit and dark tie Charles de Gaulle appeared behind the glass. With old-world courtesy he ushered Madame Yvonne de Gaulle first through the doors, then took her arm to guide her down the steps to the waiting Citroën. They parted at the car, and the President's wife climbed into the rear seat of the front vehicle on the left-hand side. The General got in beside her from the right.

Their son-in-law, Colonel Alain de Boissieu, then Chief of Staff of the armoured and cavalry units of the French Army, checked that both rear doors were safely shut, then took his place in the front beside Marroux.

In the second car two others from the group of functionaries who had accompanied the presidential couple down the steps took their seats. Henri d'Jouder, the hulking bodyguard of the day, a Kabyle from Algeria, took the front seat beside the driver, eased the heavy revolver under his left armpit, and slumped back. From then on his eyes would flicker incessantly, not over the car in front, but over the pavements and street corners as they flashed past. After a last word to one of the duty security men to be left behind, the second man got into the back alone. He was Commissaire Jean Ducret, chief of the Presidential Security Corps.

From beside the west wall two white-helmeted motards gunned their engines into life and rode slowly out of the

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shadows towards the gate. Before the entrance they stopped ten feet apart and glanced back. Marroux pulled the first Citroën away from the steps, swung towards the gate and drew up behind the motorcycle outriders. The second car followed. It was 7.50 p.m.

Again the iron grille swung open and the small cortège swept past the ramrod guards into the Faubourg St Honoré. Arriving at the end of the Faubourg St Honoré the convoy swept into the Avenue de Marigny. From under the chestnut trees a young man in a white crash helmet astride a scooter watched the cortège pass, then slid away from the kerb and followed. Traffic was normal for an August weekend and no advance warning of the President's departure had been given. Only the whine of the motor-cycle sirens told traffic cops on duty of the approach of the convoy, and they had to wave and whistle frantically to get the traffic stopped in time.

The convoy picked up speed in the tree-darkened avenue and erupted into the sunlit Place Clemenceau, heading straight across towards the Pont Alexandre III. Riding in the slipstream of the official cars the scooterist had little difficulty in following. After the bridge Marroux followed the motorcyclists into the Avenue General Gallieni and thence into the broad Boulevard des Invalides. The scooterist at this point had his answer. At the junction of the Boulevard des Invalides and the Rue de Varennes he eased back the screaming throttle and swerved towards a corner café. Inside, taking a small metal token from his pocket, he strode to the back of the café where the telephone was situated and placed a local call.

Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Marie Bastien-Thiry waited in a café in the suburb of Meudon. He was thirty-five, married with three children and he worked in the Air Ministry. Behind the conventional façade of his professional and family life he nurtured a deep bitterness towards Charles de Gaulle, who, he believed, had betrayed France and the men who in 1958 had called him back to power, by yielding Algeria to the Algerian nationalists.

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He had lost nothing through the loss of Algeria, and it was

not personal consideration that motivated him. In his own eyes he was a patriot, a man convinced that he would be serving his beloved country by slaying the man he thought had betrayed her. Many thousands shared his views at that time, but few in comparison were fanatical members of the Secret Army Organization which had sworn to kill De Gaulle and bring down his government. Bastien-Thiry was such a man.

He was sipping a beer when the call came through. The barman passed him the phone, then went to adjust the television set at the other end of the bar. Bastien-Thiry listened for a few seconds, muttered 'Very good, thank you' into the mouthpiece and set it down. His beer was already paid for. He strolled out of the bar on to the pavement, took a rolled newspaper from under his arm, and carefully unfolded it twice.

Across the street a young woman let drop the lace curtain of her first-floor flat, and turned to the twelve men who lounged about the room. She said, 'It's route number two.' The five youngsters, amateurs at the business of killing, stopped twisting their hands and jumped up.

The other seven were older and less nervous. Senior among them in the assassination attempt and second-in-command to Bastien-Thiry was Lieutenant Alain Bougrenet de la Tocnaye, an extreme right-winger from a family of landed gentry. He was thirty-five, married with two children.

The most dangerous man in the room was Georges Watin, aged thirty-nine, a bulky-shouldered, square-jowled OAS fanatic, originally an agricultural engineer from Algeria, who in two years had emerged again as one of the OAS's most dangerous trigger-men. From an old leg-wound he was known as the Limp.

When the girl announced the news the twelve men trooped downstairs via the back of the building to a side street where six vehicles, all stolen or hired, had been parked. The time was 7.55.

Bastien-Thiry had personally spent days preparing the site of the assassination, measuring angles of fire, speed and distance of the moving vehicles, and the degree of firepower necessary to stop them. The place he had chosen was a long

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straight road called the Avenue de la Libération, leading up to the main cross-roads of Petit-Clamart. The plan was for the first group containing the marksmen with their rifles to open fire on the President's car some two hundred yards before the cross-roads. They would shelter behind an Estafette van parked by the roadside, beginning their fire at a very shallow angle to the oncoming vehicles to give the marksmen the minimum of lay-off.

By Bastien-Thiry's calculations a hundred and fifty bullets should pass through the leading car by the time it came abreast of the van. With the presidential car brought to a stop, the second OAS group would sweep out of a side road to blast the security police vehicle at close range. Both groups would spend a few seconds finishing off the presidential party, then sprint for the three getaway vehicles in another side street.

Bastien-Thiry himself, the thirteenth of the party, would be the lookout man. By 8.05 the groups were in position. A hundred yards on the Paris side of the ambush Bastien-Thiry stood idly by a bus-stop with his newspaper. Waving the newspaper would give the signal to Serge Bernier, leader of the first commando, who would be standing by the Estafette. He would pass the order to the gunmen spread-eagled in the grass at his feet. Bougrenet de la Tocnaye would drive the car to intercept the security police, with Watin the Limp beside him clutching a submachine gun.

As the safety catches flicked off beside the road at Petit-Clamart, General de Gaulle's convoy cleared the heavier traffic of central Paris and reached the more open avenues of the suburbs. Here the speed increased to nearly sixty miles per hour.

As the road opened out, Francis Marroux flicked a glance at his watch, sensed the testy impatience of the old General behind him and pushed the speed up even higher. The two motor-cycle outriders dropped back to take up station at the rear of the convoy. De Gaulle never liked such ostentation sitting out in front and dispensed with them whenever he could. In this manner the convoy entered the Avenue de la Division Leclerc at Petit-Clamart. It was 8.17 p.m.

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A mile up the road Bastien-Thiry was experiencing the effects of his big mistake. He would not learn of it until told by the police as he sat months later in Death Row. Investigating the timetable of his assassination he had consulted a calendar to discover that dusk fell on 22nd August at 8.35, seemingly plenty late enough even if De Gaulle was late on his usual schedule, as indeed he was. But the calendar the Air Force colonel had consulted related to 1961. On 22nd August, 1962, dusk fell at 8.10. Those twenty-five minutes were to change the history of France. At 8.18 Bastien-Thiry discerned the convoy hurtling down the Avenue de la Libération towards him at seventy miles per hour. Frantically he waved his newspaper.

Across the road and a hundred yards down, Bernier peered angrily through the gloom at the dim figure by the bus stop. 'Has the Colonel waved his paper yet?' he asked of no one in particular. The words were hardly out of his mouth when he saw the shark nose of the President's car flash past the bus stop and into vision. 'Fire!' he screamed to the men at his feet. They opened up as the convoy came abreast of them, firing with a ninety-degree lay-off at a moving target passing them at seventy miles per hour.

That the car took twelve bullets at all was a tribute to the killers' marksmanship. Most of those hit the Citroën from behind. Two tyres shredded under the fire, and although they were self-sealing tubes the sudden loss of pressure caused the speeding car to lurch and go into a front-wheel skid. That was when Francis Marroux saved De Gaulle's life.

While the ace marksman, ex-legionnaire Varga cut up the tyres, the remainder emptied their magazines at the disappearing rear window. Several slugs passed through the bodywork and one shattered the rear window, passing within a few inches of the presidential nose. In the front seat Colonel de Boissieu turned and roared 'Get down' at his parents-in-law. Madame de Gaulle lowered her head towards her husband's lap. The General gave vent to a frosty 'What, again?' and turned to look out of the back window.

Marroux held the shuddering steering wheel and gently turned into the skid, easing down the accelerator as he did so.

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After a momentary loss of power the Citroën surged forward again towards the intersection with the Avenue du Bois, the side road where the second commando of OAS men waited. Behind Marroux the security car clung to his tail, untouched by any bullets at all.

For Bougrenet de la Tocnaye, waiting with engine running in the Avenue du Bois, the speed of the approaching cars gave him a clear choice: to intercept and commit suicide as the hurtling metal cut him to pieces or let the clutch in a half-second too late. He chose the latter. As he swung his car out of the side road and into line with the presidential convoy, it was not De Gaulle's car he came alongside, but that of the marksman bodyguard d'Jouder and Commissaire Ducret.

Leaning from the right-hand side window, outside the car from the waist up, Watin emptied his submachine gun at the back of the DS in front, in which he could see De Gaulle's haughty profile through the smashed glass.

'Why don't those idiots fire back?' De Gaulle asked plaintively. D'Jouder was trying to get a shot at the OAS killers across ten feet of air between the two cars, but the police driver blocked his view. Ducret shouted to the driver to stick with the President, and a second later the OAS were left behind. The two motor-cycle outriders, one having nearly been unseated by de la Tocnaye's sudden rush out of the side road, recovered and closed up. The whole convoy swept into the roundabout and road junction, crossed it, and continued towards Villacoublay.

At the ambush site the OAS men had no time for recriminations. These were to come later. Leaving the three cars used in the operation they leapt aboard the getaway vehicles and disappeared into the descending gloom.

From his car-borne transmitter Commissaire Ducret called Villacoublay and told them briefly what had happened. When the convoy arrived ten minutes later General de Gaulle insisted on driving straight to the apron where the helicopter was waiting. As the car stopped, a surge of officers and officials surrounded it, pulling open the doors to assist a shaken Madame de Gaulle to her feet. From the other side the General

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emerged from the debris and shook glass splinters from his lapel. Ignoring the panicky solicitations from the surrounding officers, he walked round the car to take his wife's arm.

'Come, my dear, we are going home,' he told her, and finally gave the Air Force staff his verdict on the OAS. 'They can't shoot straight.' With that he guided his wife into the helicopter and took his seat beside her. He was joined by d'Jouder and they took off for a weekend in the country.

On the tarmac Francis Marroux sat ashen-faced behind the wheel still. Both tyres along the right-hand side of the car had finally given out and the DS was riding on its rims. Ducret muttered a quiet word of congratulation to him, then went on with the business of clearing up.

While journalists the world over speculated on the assassination attempt and for lack of anything better filled their columns with personal conjectures, the French police, headed by the Sûreté Nationale and backed up by the Secret Service and the Gendarmerie, launched the biggest police operation in French history. Soon it was to become the biggest manhunt the country had yet known, only later to be surpassed by the manhunt for another assassin whose story remains unknown but who is still listed in the files by his code-name, the Jackal.

They got their first break on 3rd September and as is so often the case with police work it was a routine check that brought results. Outside the town of Valence, south of Lyons on the main road from Paris to Marseilles, a police road-block stopped a private car containing four men. They had stopped hundreds that day to examine identity papers, but in this case one of the men in the car had no papers on him. He claimed he had lost them. He and the other three were taken to Valence for routine questioning.

At Valence it was established that the other three in the car had nothing to do with the fourth, apart from having offered him a lift. They were released. The fourth man's fingerprints were taken and sent to Paris, just to see if he was who he said he was. The answer came back twelve hours later: the fingerprints were those of a twenty-two-year-old deserter from the

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Foreign Legion, who faced charges under military law. But the name he had given was quite accurate – Pierre-Denis Magade.

Magade was taken to the headquarters of the Service Régional of the Police Judiciaire at Lyons. While waiting in an anteroom for interrogation, one of the police guarding him playfully asked, 'Well, what about Petit-Clamart?'

Magade shrugged helplessly. 'All right,' he answered, 'what do you want to know?'

As stunned police officers listened to him and stenographers' pens scratched across one notebook after another, Magade 'sang' for eight hours. By the end he had named every one of the participants of Petit-Clamart, and nine others who had played smaller roles in the plotting stages or in procuring the equipment. Twenty-two in all. The hunt was on, and this time the police knew who they were looking for.

In the end only one escaped, and has never been caught to this day. Georges Watin got away and is presumed to be living in Spain along with most of the other OAS chiefs among the civilian settlers of Algeria.

The interrogation and preparation of the charges against Bastien-Thiry, Bougrenet de la Tocnaye and the other leaders of the plot were finished by December and the group went on trial in January 1963.

While the trial was on the OAS gathered its strength for another all-out attack on the Gaullist Government and the French Secret Services fought back tooth and claw. Under the pleasant norms of Parisian life, beneath the veneer of culture and civilization, one of the bitterest and most sadistic underground wars of modern history was fought out.

The French Secret Service is called the Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionage, known for short as SDECE. Its duties are both those of espionage outside France and counter-espionage within, though each service may overlap the other's territory on occasion. Service One is pure intelligence, subdivided into bureaux known by the initial R for Renseignement (information). These subdivisions are R.1 Intelligence Analysis; R.2 Eastern Europe;

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R.3 Western Europe; R.4 Africa; R.5 Middle East; R.6 Far East; R.7 America/Western Hemisphere. Service Two is concerned with counter-espionage. Three and Four comprise the Communist Section in one office, Six is Finance and Seven Administration.

Service Five has a one-word title – Action. This office was the core of the anti-OAS war. From the headquarters in a complex of nondescript buildings off the Boulevard Mortier close to the Porte des Lilas, a dingy suburb of north-east Paris, the hundred toughs of the Action Service went out to war. These men, mainly Corsicans, were the nearest thing real life ever got to the fictional 'tough guy'. They were trained to a peak of physical fitness, then taken to Satory Camp where a special section shut off from the rest taught them everything known about destruction. They became experts in fighting with small arms, unarmed combat, karate and judo. They underwent courses in radio communication, demolition and sabotage, interrogation with and without the use of torture, kidnapping, arson and assassination.

Some spoke only French, others were fluent in several languages and at home in any capital in the world. They had the authority to kill in the course of duty and often used it.

As the activities of the OAS became more violent and brutal, the Director of the SDECE, General Eugene Guibaud, finally took the muzzle off these men and let them loose on the OAS. Some of them enlisted in the OAS and infiltrated into its highest councils. From here they were content to provide information on which others could act, and many OAS emissaries on missions into France or other areas where they were vulnerable to the police were picked up on information provided by Action Service men inside the terrorist organization. On other occasions wanted men could not be inveigled into France and were ruthlessly killed outside the country. Many relatives of OAS men who simply disappeared believed ever after that the men had been liquidated by the Action Service.

Not that the OAS needed lessons in violence. They hated the Action Service men, known as the Barbouzes or Bearded

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Ones because of their undercover role, more than any policeman. In the last days of the struggle for power between the OAS and the Gaullist authorities inside Algiers the OAS captured seven barbouzes alive. The bodies were later found hanging from balconies and lamp-posts minus ears and noses. In this manner the undercover war went on, and the complete story of who died under torture at whose hands in which cellar will never be told.

The remainder of the barbouzes stayed outside the OAS at the beck and call of the SDECE. Some of them had been professional thugs from the underworld before being enlisted, kept up their old contacts, and on more than one occasion enlisted the aid of their former underworld friends to do a particularly dirty job for the Government. It was these activities that gave rise to talk in France of a 'parallel' (unofficial) police, supposedly at the orders of one of President de Gaulle's right-hand men, M. Jacques Foccart. In truth no 'parallel' police existed; the activities attributed to them were carried out by the Action Service strong-arms or temporarily enlisted gang bosses from the 'milieu'.

Corsicans, who dominated both the Paris and Marseilles underworld and the Action Service, know a thing or two about vendettas, and after the slaying of the seven barbouzes of Mission C in Algiers a vendetta was declared against the OAS. In the same manner as the Corsican underworld helped the Allies during the landings in the South of France in 1944 (for their own ends; they later cornered most of the vice trade along the Côte d'Azur as a reward) so in the early sixties the Corsicans fought for France again in a vendetta with the OAS. Many of the OAS men who were pieds-noirs (Algerian-born Frenchmen) had the same characteristics as the Corsicans, and at times the war was almost fratricidal.

As the trial of Bastien-Thiry and his fellows wore on, the OAS campaign also got under way. Its guiding light, the behind-the-scenes instigator of the Petit-Clamart plot, was Colonel Antoine Argoud. A product of one of France's top universities, the Ecole Polytechnique, Argoud had a good brain and a dynamic energy. As a lieutenant under De Gaulle

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in the Free French he had fought for the liberation of France from the Nazis. Later he commanded a regiment of cavalry in Algiers. A short, wiry man, he was a brilliant but ruthless soldier, and he had become by 1962 operations chief for the OAS in exile.

Experienced in psychological warfare, he understood that the fight against Gaullist France had to be conducted on all levels, by terror, diplomacy and public relations. As part of the campaign he arranged for the head of the National Resistance Council, the political wing of the OAS, former French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault, to give a series of interviews to newspapers and television across Western Europe to explain the OAS's opposition to General de Gaulle in 'respectable' terms.

Argoud was now putting to use the high intelligence that had once made him the youngest colonel in the French Army and now made him the most dangerous man in the OAS. He set up for Bidault a chain of interviews with major networks and newspaper correspondents, during which the old politician was able to put a sober cloak over the less palatable activities of the OAS thugs.

The success of Bidault's Argoud-inspired propaganda operation alarmed the French Government as much as the terror tactics and the wave of plastic bombs exploding in cinemas and cafés all over France. Then on 14th February another plot to assassinate General de Gaulle was uncovered. The following day he was due to give a lecture at the Ecole Militaire on the Champ de Mars. The plot was that on entering the hall he was to be shot in the back by an assassin perched among the eaves of the adjacent block.

Those who later faced trial for the plot were Jean Bichon, a captain of artillery named Robert Poinard, and an English-language teacher at the Military Academy, Madame Paule Rousselet de Liffiac. The trigger-man was to have been Georges Watin, but once again the Limp got away. A rifle with sniper-scope was found at Poinard's flat and the three were arrested. It was stated at their later trial that, seeking a way to spirit Watin and his gun into the Academy, they had consulted

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Warrant Officer Marius Tho, who had gone straight to the police. General de Gaulle duly attended the military ceremony at the appointed time on the 15th, but made the concession of arriving in an armour-plated car, to his great distaste.

As a plot it was amateurish beyond belief, but it annoyed De Gaulle. Summoning Interior Minister Frey the next day he hammered the table and told the Minister responsible for national security, 'This assassination business has gone far enough.'

It was decided to make an example of some of the top OAS conspirators to deter the others. Frey had no doubts about the outcome of the Bastien-Thiry trial still going on in the Supreme Military Court, for Bastien-Thiry was at pains to explain from the dock why he thought Charles de Gaulle should die. But something more in the way of a deterrent was needed.

On 22nd February a copy of a memorandum which the director of Service Two of SDECE (counter-espionage/internal security) had sent to the Interior Minister landed on the desk of the head of the Action Service. Here is an extract:

'We have succeeded in obtaining the whereabouts of one of the main ringleaders of the subversive movement, namely ex-Colonel of the French Army, Antoine Argoud. He has fled to Germany and intends, according to information from our Intelligence Service there, to remain for several days . . .

'This being so it should be possible to get at Argoud and perhaps seize him. As the request made by our official counter-espionage service to the competent German security organizations has been refused, and these organizations now expect our agents to be on the heels of Argoud and other OAS leaders, the operation must, in so far as it is directed against the person of Argoud, be carried out with maximum speed and discretion.'

The job was handed over to the Action Service.

In the mid-afternoon of 25th February Argoud arrived back in Munich from Rome where he had been meeting other OAS leaders. Instead of going straight to Unertlstrasse

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he took a taxi to the Eden-Wolff Hotel where he had booked a room, apparently for a meeting. He never attended it. In the hall he was accosted by two men who spoke to him in faultless German. He presumed they were German police and reached into his breast pocket for his passport.

He felt both arms grabbed in a vice-like grip, his feet left the ground and he was whisked outside to a waiting laundry van. He lashed out and was answered with a torrent of French oaths. A horny hand chopped across his nose, another slammed him in the stomach, a finger felt for the nerve spot below the ear and he went out like a light.

Twenty-four hours later a telephone rang in the Brigade Criminelle of the Police Judiciaire at 36 Quai des Orfèvres in Paris. A hoarse voice told the desk sergeant who answered that he was speaking for the OAS, and that Antoine Argoud, 'nicely tied up', was in a van parked behind the CID building. A few minutes later the door of the van was jerked open and Argoud stumbled out into a circle of dumbfounded police officers.

His eyes, bandaged for twenty-four hours, would not focus. He had to be helped to stand. His face was covered with dried blood from a nose-bleed, and his mouth ached from the gag which the police pulled out of it. When someone asked him, 'Are you Colonel Antoine Argoud?' he mumbled 'Yes'. Somehow the Action Service had spirited him across the frontier during the previous night, and the anonymous phone call to the police about the parcel waiting for them in their own parking lot was just their private sense of humour at work. He was not released until June 1968.

But one thing the Action Service men had not counted on; in removing Argoud, despite the enormous demoralization this caused in the OAS, they had paved the way for his shadowy deputy, the little-known but equally astute Lieutenant-Colonel Marc Rodin, to assume command of operations aimed at assassinating De Gaulle. In many ways it was a bad bargain.

On 4th March the Supreme Military Court delivered its verdict on Jean-Marie Bastien-Thiry. He and two others were sentenced to death, as were a further three still at large

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including Watin the Limp. On 8th March General de Gaulle listened for three hours in silence to appeals for clemency by the lawyers of the condemned men. He commuted two of the death sentences to life imprisonment, but Bastien-Thiry's condemnation stood.

That night his lawyer told the Air Force Colonel of the decision.

'It is fixed for the 11th,' he told his client, and when the latter continued to smile disbelievingly, blurted out, 'You are going to be shot.'

Bastien-Thiry kept smiling and shook his head.

'You don't understand,' he told the lawyer, 'no squad of Frenchmen will raise their rifles against me.'

He was wrong. The execution was reported on the 8 a.m. news of Radio Europe Number One in French. It was heard in most parts of Western Europe by those who cared to tune in. In a small hotel room in Austria the broadcast was to set off a train of thoughts and actions that brought General de Gaulle nearer to death than at any time in his career. The room was that of Colonel Marc Rodin, new operations chief of the OAS.

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CHAPTER TWO

Marc Rodin flicked off the switch of his transistor radio and rose from the table, leaving the breakfast tray almost untouched. He walked over to the window, lit another in the endless chain of cigarettes and gazed out at the snow-encrusted landscape which the late arriving spring had not yet started to dismantle.

'Bastards.' He murmured the word quietly and with great venom, following up with another *sotto voce* string of nouns and epithets that expressed his feeling towards the French President, his Government and the Action Service.

Rodin was unlike his predecessor in almost every way. Tall and spare, with a cadaverous face hollowed by the hatred within, he usually masked his emotions with an un-Latin frigidity. For him there had been no Ecole Polytechnique to open doors to promotion. The son of a cobbler, he had escaped to England by fishing boat in the halcyon days of his late teens when the Germans overran France, and had enlisted as a private soldier under the banner of the Cross of Lorraine.

Promotion through sergeant to warrant officer had come the hard way, in bloody battles across the face of North Africa under Koenig and later through the hedgerows of Normandy with Leclerc. A field commission during the fight for Paris had got him the officer's chevrons his education and breeding could never have obtained, and in postwar France the choice had been between reverting to civilian life or staying in the Army.

But revert to what? He had no trade but that of cobbler which his father had taught him, and he found the working class of his native country dominated by Communists, who

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had also taken over the Resistance and the Free French of the Interior. So he stayed in the Army, later to experience the bitterness of an officer from the ranks who saw a new young generation of educated boys graduating from the officer schools, earning in theoretical lessons carried out in classrooms the same chevrons he had sweated blood for. As he watched them pass him in rank and privilege the bitterness started to set in.

There was only one thing left to do, and that was join one of the colonial regiments, the tough crack soldiers who did the fighting while the conscript army paraded round drill squares. He managed a transfer to the colonial paratroops.

Within a year he had been a company commander in Indo-China, living among other men who spoke and thought as he did. For a young man from a cobbler's bench, promotion could still be obtained through combat, and more combat. By the end of the Indo-China campaign he was a major and after an unhappy and frustrating year in France he was sent to Algeria.

The French withdrawal from Indo-China and the year he spent in France had turned his latent bitterness into a consuming loathing of politicians and Communists, whom he regarded as one and the same thing. Not until France was ruled by a soldier could she ever be weaned away from the grip of the traitors and lickspittles who permeated her public life. Only in the Army were both breeds extinct.

Like most combat officers who had seen their men die and occasionally buried the hideously mutilated bodies of those unlucky enough to be taken alive, Rodin worshipped soldiers as the true salt of the earth, the men who sacrificed themselves in blood so that the bourgeoisie could live at home in comfort. To learn from the civilians of his native land after eight years of combat in the forests of Indo-China that most of them cared not a fig for the soldiery, to read the denunciations of the military by the left-wing intellectuals for mere trifles like the torturing of prisoners to obtain vital information, had set off inside Marc Rodin a reaction which, combined with the native bitterness stemming from his own lack of opportunity, had turned into zealotry.

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He remained convinced that given enough backing by the civil authorities on the spot and the Government and people back home, the Army could have beaten the Viet-Minh. The cession of Indo-China had been a massive betrayal of the thousands of fine young men who had died there – seemingly for nothing. For Rodin there would be, could be, no more betrayals. Algeria would prove it. He left the shore of Marseilles in the spring of 1956 as near a happy man as he would ever be, convinced that the distant hills of Algeria would see the consummation of what he regarded as his life's work, the apotheosis of the French Army in the eyes of the world.

Within two years of bitter and ferocious fighting little happened to shake his convictions. True, the rebels were not as easy to put down as he had thought at first. However many fellagha he and his men shot, however many villages were razed to the ground, however many FLN terrorists died under torture, the rebellion spread until it enveloped the land and consumed the cities.

What was needed, of course, was more help from the Metropole. Here at least there could be no question of a war in a far-flung corner of the Empire. Algeria was France, a part of France, inhabited by three million Frenchmen. One would fight for Algeria as for Normandy, Brittany or the Alpes Maritimes. When he got his lieutenant-colonelcy Marc Rodin moved out of the bled and into the cities, first Bone then Constantine.

In the bled he had been fighting the soldiers of the ALN, irregular soldiers but still fighting men. His hatred of them was nothing to what consumed him as he entered the sneaking, vicious war of the cities, a war fought with plastic bombs planted by cleaners in French-patronized cafés, supermarkets and play-parks. The measures he took to cleanse Constantine of the filth who planted these bombs among French civilians earned him in the Casbah the title of Butcher.

All that was lacking for the final obliteration of the FLN and its army, the ALN, was more help from Paris. Like most fanatics Rodin could blind himself to facts with sheer belief. The escalating costs of the war, the tottering economy of France under

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the burden of a war becoming increasingly unwinnable, the demoralization of the conscripts, were a bagatelle.

In June 1958 General de Gaulle returned to power as Prime Minister of France. Efficiently disposing of the corrupt and tottering Fourth Republic, he founded the Fifth. When he spoke the words whose utterance in the mouths of the generals had brought him back to the Matignon and then in January 1959 to the Elysée, '*Algérie Française*,' Rodin went to his room and cried. When De Gaulle visited Algeria his presence was for Rodin like that of Zeus coming down from Olympus. The new policy, he was sure, was on the way. The Communists would be swept from their offices, Jean-Paul Sartre must surely be shot for treason, the trade unions would be brought into submission and the final wholehearted backing of France for her kith and kin in Algeria and for her Army protecting the frontiers of French civilization would be forthcoming.

Rodin was as sure of this as the rising of the sun in the East. When De Gaulle started his measures to restore France his own way, Rodin thought there must be some mistake. One had to give the old man time. When the first rumours of preliminary talks with Ben Bella and the FLN filtered through Rodin could not believe it. Although he sympathized with the revolt of the settlers led by Big Jo Ortiz in 1960, he still felt the lack of progress in smashing the fellagha once and for all was simply a tactical move by De Gaulle. Le Vieux, he felt sure, must know what he was doing. Had he not said it, the golden words *Algérie Française*?

When the proof came finally and beyond any doubt that Charles de Gaulle's concept of a resuscitated France did not include a French Algeria, Rodin's world disintegrated like a china vase hit by a train. Of faith and hope, belief and confidence, there was nothing left. Just hate. Hate for the system, for the politicians, for the intellectuals, for the Algerians, for the trade unions, for the journalists, for the foreigners; but most of all hate for That Man. Apart from a few wet-eared ninnies who refused to come, Rodin led his entire battalion into the military putsch of April 1961.

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It failed. In one simple, depressingly clever move De Gaulle

foiled the putsch before it could get off the ground. None of the officers had taken more than a passing notice when thousands of simple transistor radios were issued to the troops in the weeks before the final announcement that talks were being started with the FLN. The radios were regarded as a harmless comfort for the troops, and many officers and senior NCOs approved the idea. The pop music that came over the air from France was a pleasant distraction for the boys from the heat, the flies, the boredom.

The voice of De Gaulle was not so harmless. When the loyalty of the Army was finally put to the test tens of thousands of conscripts spread out in barracks across Algeria turned on their radios for the news. After the news they heard the same voice that Rodin himself had listened to in June 1940. Almost the same message. 'You are faced with a choice of loyalties. I am France, the instrument of her destiny. Follow me. Obey me.'

Some battalion commanders woke up with only a handful of officers and most of their sergeants left.

The mutiny was broken like the illusions – by radio. Rodin had been luckier than some. One hundred and twenty of his officers, NCOs and rankers remained with him. This was because he commanded a unit with a higher proportion of old sweats from Indo-China and the Algerian bled than most. Together with the other putschistes they formed the Secret Army Organization, pledged to overthrow the Judas of the Elyseé Palace.

Between the triumphant FLN and the loyal Army of France there was little left but time for an orgy of destruction. In the last seven weeks, as the French settlers sold their life's work for a song and fled the war-torn coast, the Secret Army exacted one last hideous revenge on what they had to leave behind. When it was over there remained only exile for the leaders whose names were known to the Gaullist authorities.

Rodin became deputy to Argoud as operations chief of the OAS in exile in the winter of 1961. Argoud's was the flair, the talent, the inspiration behind the offensive the OAS launched on Metropolitan France from then on. Rodin's was the organization, the cunning, the shrewd commonsense. Had he merely

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