

Bloodmoney

David Ignatius. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011), 372 pp.

Reviewed by Michael Bradford

In *Bloodmoney*, the latest David Ignatius espionage thriller, the author takes on a classic theme of the modern genre—the corrosive, hostile penetration of a spy agency and the reflexive, must-succeed hunt it generates. The scenario pits intelligence professionals' wits against a cunning infiltrator's determination to avoid detection. In this novel, the afflicted organization is the CIA—specifically, a Los Angeles-based commercial cover unit whose officers run a high-stakes political influence program targeting a single high-priority country. The unit, under the aegis of a tightly compartmented London front company, has operations officers engaging prominent Pakistani officials, business figures, and opinion makers. The secret relationships that are pitched are often accepted, leveraged by cash rewards for actions and influence aligned to US regional policy goals.

The unit's impressive results allow its chief, the politically ambitious Jeff Gertz, to advance a personal agenda, which includes the unit's functional independence and steady distancing from the oversight and control of CIA headquarters. When several of his operations officers are intercepted and killed en route to meetings with assets, Gertz faces the twin dangers of the unit's functional destruction and the end of his own career. He appoints Sophie Marx, an up-and-coming young officer, as his counterintelligence (CI) manager and tasks her with taking whatever steps are necessary to locate and terminate the penetration. Marx fully understands that Gertz prefers she operate under Langley's radar and that she might be risking her career by tackling the problem as an essentially unauthorized freelancer. She

also knows that if she succeeds in salvaging the unit's future and her boss's ambitions, the benefit to her own career will be dramatic.

Marx begins the assignment without realizing that the security breach has sparked the interest of Cyril Hoffman, a wily Agency deputy director, who is suspicious of the LA unit's freewheeling operations and is no admirer of Gertz. Tracking Marx's progress from a distance, Hoffman may at any time insert himself into the case. In this way, Ignatius has set the table for an entertaining, if unexceptional, voyage as Marx crosses multiple time zones following leads, interrogating suspects, and raising and dismissing theories to explain the deadly intrusion, all the while hoping to avoid the rivalry-driven pitfalls posed by Gertz and Hoffman.

Despite the thinly drawn characters, the conventional pacing, and an awkwardly telegraphed, violent conclusion, *Bloodmoney* is nonetheless a valuable and recommended read: the hidden threat originates in South Asia, and Ignatius includes two characters native to that area who, in their failure to understand America and its intentions, and even to understand each other, effectively personify that troubled region's endless capacity to engender crippling suspicions, trustless partnerships, and unavoidable tragedy. The Pakistani intelligence chief, Lieutenant General Mohammed Malik, is the quintessential Punjabi technocrat. He is brilliant, ruthless, and firmly fixed atop his country's most powerful institution. Malik's instincts tell him Pakistani hierarchies are being influenced and corrupted by a new, hidden catalyst. He assumes it is American but

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cannot isolate it or its tactics. Despite believing Islamabad Station's claims of ignorance, Malik is convinced "Washington thinks it is acceptable to send secret warriors with bribes into the territory of an ally." This new challenge to Pakistan's integrity heightens Malik's decades-long frustration with his country's linkage to the western superpower: "They [the Americans] were on all sides of every deal they made; they were the gambler at the table, and they owned the casino. Even when they thought you understood what they were doing, you couldn't be sure, because they didn't know themselves."

Malik's suspicions lead him to the bordering Tribal Agencies, where the native Pathans' ruling codex of prescribed acts of honor and vengeance leave him as confused by their motivations and actions as he is by those of the Americans. These ingrained rules of obligation determine the actions of Dr. Omar al-Wazir, a world-class computer specialist whose formative training took place in the United States and who "had multiple binary identities, it could be said. He was a Pakistani but also, in some sense, a man tied to the West. He was a Pushtun from the raw tribal area of South Waziristan, but he was also a modern man. He

was a secular scientist and also a Muslim, if not quite a believer. His loyalties might indeed have been confused before the events of nearly two years ago, but not now." Those events lead to the twin mysteries being desperately chased down by Marx and Malik, whose crossed paths and uneasy cooperation presage a final scene in which several characters lose everything. Readers can judge whether the survivors have won anything at all.

Ignatius has travelled throughout South Asia, including South Waziristan, and his renderings of locale and atmosphere are convincing. More importantly, his journalist's eye took a deeply focused reading of the people he met. Malik and al-Wazir, compelling characters, speak to the quality of the author's power of observation. Ignatius's impressive knowledge of US intelligence agencies and their workings is apparent in his syndicated columns, so artistic license can be granted here for his having the Los Angeles unit functioning as a nearly off-the-books entity. Indeed, Ignatius is fully aware that all modern intelligence agencies have a Mohammed Malik or Cyril Hoffman on board, finely attuned to potential threats from without, or within, their services.

