

THE INSIDE RING



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出版者:Anchor Books (2006年6月27日)

出版时间:2006年06月

装帧:简装

isbn:9781400095148

The Washington conspiracy thriller is a publishing evergreen, and while Lawson's debut may look like others in the genre, it's in a league by itself. Joe DeMarco has a Capitol building office and the title of "Counsel Pro Tem for Liaison Affairs," but he's really an all-purpose legman for John Fitzpatrick Mahoney, Speaker of the House. In DeMarco's words: "If a politician thinks his wife is cheating on him, I make sure she's not screwing a journalist. That's the kind of stuff I do, sir. Little stuff." But he's pushed into a much bigger game after Mahoney lends him to the director of homeland security, who wants DeMarco to investigate a recent assassination attempt on the president. Of particular interest to the director is Secret Service agent Billy Ray Mattis,

who predicted the assassination attempt. All the stock government types are here, but Lawson's craft, intelligence and humor turn these ho-hum regulars into characters worth savoring. DeMarco himself is perfectly human, prey to all the species' frailties and tremendously appealing. The bad guys are sufficiently evil, the plot properly labyrinthine, the solution to the mystery completely satisfying. This is high-level entertainment from a writer who could soon rise to the top of the thriller heap. Agent, David Gernert. Foreign rights to Germany, Holland, Israel, Poland and the U.K. (May)

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This exciting, danger-filled novel begins with an attempt on the life of the U.S. president; he survives, but there are two other fatalities. Days before the assassination attempt, Andy Banks, secretary of Homeland Security, received a note threatening the president's life. He passed the note on to the Secret Service, whose director ignored it. Now, Banks is wracked with guilt over the note and his failure to make anyone pay attention to it. He turns to the Speaker of the House, who knows a guy who solves problems without going through the usual political channels. That guy is Joe DeMarco, a fix-it man who's never dealt with something of quite this magnitude. When the Speaker sets him loose on the Secret Service director, DeMarco soon discovers that the world of politics is a heck of a lot more complex than he had ever suspected. The author, who was an "independent contractor" for the U.S. Navy, seems to know what he's talking about; and clearly DeMarco is being positioned as a series lead. So far so good. David Pitt

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“Wonderfully complex plot, sardonic humor and memorable characters. . . . Lawson has a great ability to shade character and evoke meaningful description as economically as possible. . . . In two words: more, please.” –The Baltimore Sun

“Lawson shows a knack for sketching realistic characters, even minor ones, in deft and nuanced strokes. Lawson is droll, writes sharp dialogue, and . . . know[s] his way around Beltway politicking.” –The Seattle Times

“Thrilling enough to demand a sequel.” –Daily News

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