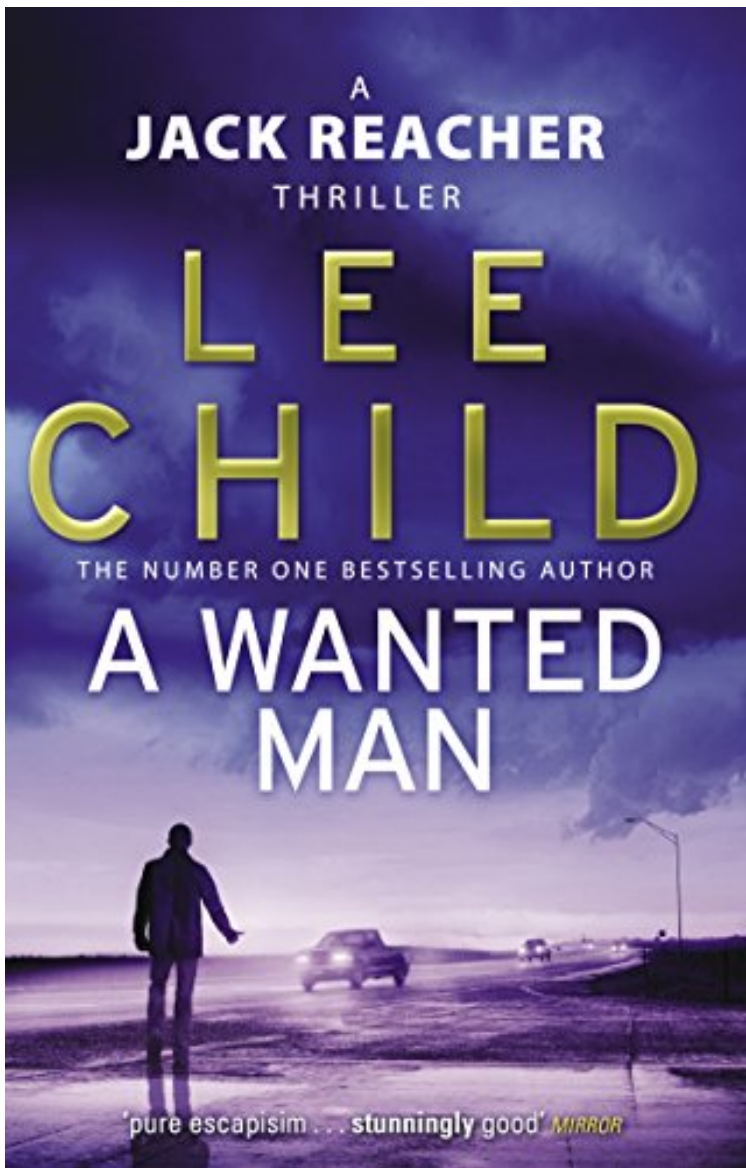


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A Wanted Man (Jack Reacher, Book 17)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWhen you're as big and rough as Jack Reacher - and you have a badly set, freshly busted nose - it isn't easy to hitch a ride. At last, he's picked up by three strangers - two men and a woman. Within minutes it becomes clear they're all lying about everything - and there's a police roadblock ahead. There has been an incident, and the cops are looking for the bad guys ... Will they get through because the three are innocent? Or because the three are now four? Is Reacher just a decoy? He could take out Bond, Dirty Harry, Jason Bourne and Ethan Hunt with both hands tied behind his back. And then sleep with their girlfriends two at a time before getting the last bus out of town' SunExtraitChapter 1The eyewitness said he didnt actually see it happen. But how else could it have gone down? Not long after midnight a man in a

green winter coat had gone into a small concrete bunker through its only door. Two men in black suits had followed him in. There had been a short pause. The two men in the black suits had come out again. The man in the green winter coat had not come out again. The two men in the black suits had walked thirty brisk feet and climbed into a bright red car. Fire-engine red, the eyewitness called it. Vivid red. Fairly new. A regular four-door sedan, the eyewitness thought. Or maybe a five-door. Or a three-door. But definitely not a two-door coupe. A Toyota, the eyewitness thought. Or maybe a Honda. Or a Hyundai. Maybe a Kia. But whichever, the two men in the black suits had driven away in it. There was still no sign of the man in the green winter coat. Then blood had pooled out from under the concrete bunkers door. The eyewitness had called 911. The county sheriff had shown up and gotten the story. He was good at hustling folk along while looking patient. It was one of his many talents. Eventually the eyewitness had finished up. Then the county sheriff had thought for a long moment. He was in a part of the nation where in every direction there were hundreds of square miles of emptiness just over the dark horizon. Where roads were long lonely ribbons. He was in roadblock country. So he had called the highway patrol, and then he had ordered up the helicopter from the state capital. He had put out an urgent APB on a bright red import carrying two men in black suits. Jack Reacher rode for ninety miles and ninety minutes with a woman in a dirty gray van, and then he saw bright vapor lights up ahead at the highway cloverleaf, with big green signs pointing west and east. The woman slowed the van, and stopped, and Reacher got out and thanked her and waved her away. She used the first ramp, west toward Denver and Salt Lake City, and he walked under the bridge and set up on the eastbound ramp, one foot on the shoulder and one in the traffic lane, and he stuck out his thumb and smiled and tried to look friendly. Which was not easy. Reacher was a big man, six feet five inches tall, heavily built, and that night as always he looked a little ragged and unkempt. Lonely drivers wanted pleasant and unthreatening company, and Reacher knew from long experience that visually he was no ones first choice of companion. Too intimidating. And right then he was further handicapped by a freshly broken nose. He had patched the injury with a length of silver duct tape, which he knew must make him look even more grotesque. He knew the tape must be shining and glittering in the yellow light. But he felt the tape was helping him medically, so he decided to keep it in place for the first hour. If he didnt get a ride inside sixty minutes, he would consider peeling it off. He didnt get a ride inside sixty minutes. Traffic was light. Nebraska, at night, in the wintertime. The cloverleaf he was at was the only significant interchange for miles around, but even so whole minutes passed with no action at all. Up on the bridge the through traffic was fairly steady, but few people seemed keen to join it. In the first hour only forty vehicles showed up to turn east. Cars, trucks, SUVs, different makes, different models, different colors. Thirty of them blew past without even slowing. Ten drivers checked him out and then looked away and accelerated onward. Not unusual. Hitchhiking had been getting harder for years. Time to shorten the odds. He turned away and used a splintered thumbnail to pick at the edge of the duct tape on his face. He got half an inch of it loose and gripped that makeshift tab between the pad of his thumb and his forefinger. Two schools of thought. One went for the fast rip. The other advocated a slow peel. An illusory choice, Reacher thought. The pain was the same either way. So he split the difference and opted for a fast peel. No big deal on his cheek. A different story across his nose. Cuts reopened, the swelling lifted and moved, the fracture itself clicked and ground. No big deal on the other cheek. He rolled the bloodied tape into a cylinder and stuck it in his pocket. He spat on his fingers and wiped his face. He heard a helicopter a thousand feet overhead and saw a high-power searchlight beam stabbing down through the darkness, resting here, resting there, moving on. He turned back and put one foot in the traffic lane again and stuck out his thumb. The helicopter hung around for a spell and then lost interest and hammered away west until its noise died back to nothing. Traffic heading cross-country on the bridge stayed sparse but steady. Feeder traffic heading north and south on the county road got thinner. But almost all of it turned one way or the other on the highway. Almost none of it continued straight. Reacher remained optimistic. The night was cold, which helped his face. Numbness dulled the ache. A pick-up truck with Kansas plates came out of the south and turned east and slowed to a roll. The driver was a rangy black guy bundled into a thick coat. Maybe his heater wasnt working. He eyeballed Reacher long and hard. He almost stopped. But he didnt. He looked away and drove on by. Reacher had money in his pocket. If he could get to Lincoln or Omaha he could get a bus. But he couldnt get to Lincoln or Omaha. Not without a ride. He took to tucking his right hand under his left arm between cars, to stop it from freezing. He stamped his feet. His breath pooled around his head like a cloud. A highway patrol cruiser blew by with lights but no siren. Two cops inside. They didnt even glance Reachers way. Their focus was up ahead. Some kind of an incident, maybe. Two more cars almost stopped. One out of the south, and one out of the north,

minutes apart. They both slowed, stumbled, stuttered, eyeballed, and then picked up speed and drove on by.

Getting closer, Reacher thought. Its coming. Maybe the late hour was helping. People were more compassionate at midnight than midday. And night driving already felt a little out of the ordinary. Picking up a random stranger wasnt such a big leap. He hoped. Another driver took a good long look, but kept on going. And another. Reacher spat on his palms and slicked his hair into place. He kept the smile on his face. He remained optimistic. And then finally, after a total of ninety-three minutes on the ramp, a car stopped for him. Chapter 2 The car stopped thirty feet upstream of him. It had a local plate, and was a reasonable size, and American, and dark in color. A Chevrolet, Reacher thought, probably dark blue, or gray, or black. It was hard to tell, in the vapor light. Dark metallics were always anonymous at night. There were three people in the car. Two men in the front, and a woman in the back. The two men were twisted around in their seats, like there was a big three-way discussion going on. Like a democracy. Should we pick this guy up or not? Which suggested to Reacher that the three people didnt know each other very well. Such decisions among good friends were usually instinctive. These three were business colleagues, maybe, a team of equals, thrown together for the duration, exaggeratedly respectful of each others positions, especially the outnumbered womans. Reacher saw the woman nod, and he lip-read her yes, and the men turned back and faced front again, and the car rolled forward. It stopped again with the front passengers window alongside Reachers hip. The glass came down. Reacher bent at the waist and felt warmth on his face. This cars heater was working just fine. That was for damn sure. The guy in the front passenger seat asked, Where are you headed tonight, sir? Reacher had been a cop in the army for thirteen years, and then for almost as long had lived on his wits, and he had survived both phases of his life by being appropriately cautious and by staying alert. All five senses, all the time. Deciding whether or not to take an offered ride depended mostly on smell. Could he smell beer? Weed? Bourbon? But right then he could smell nothing at all. His nose had just been broken. His nasal passages were clogged with blood and swellings. Maybe his septum was permanently deviated. It felt entirely possible he would never smell anything ever again. Touch was not an option in that situation, either. Nor was taste. He would learn nothing by groping around like a blind man, or by licking things. Which left sight and sound. He heard neutral tones from the front passenger, no marked regional accent, an educated cadence, an air of authority and executive experience. On all three of them he saw soft uncalloused hands, unmuscled frames, neat hair, no tans. Indoor people. Office folk. Not at the top of the tree, but a long way from the bottom. They each looked somewhere in their middle forties, perhaps halfway through their lives, but more than halfway through their careers. Like lieutenant colonels, maybe, in army terms. Solid achievers, but not superstars. Each of them had on black pants and a blue denim shirt. Like uniforms. The shirts looked cheap and new, still creased from the wrapper. A team-building exercise, Reacher figured. Some kind of corporate bullshit. Fly a bunch of middle-ranking executives out from their regional offices, get them together in the wilderness, give them shirts, set them tasks. Maybe all the hoo-hah was making them feel a little bit adventurous, which was why they were picking him up. And maybe there would be candid mutual critiquing afterward, which was why they had labored through the big three-way democratic discussion. Teams needed teamwork, and teamwork needed consensus, and consensus needed to be unforced, and gender issues were always sensitive. In fact Reacher was a little surprised the woman wasnt riding in front, or driving. Although driving might have been seen as a subservient role, for the only woman in a trio. Like fetching coffee. A minefield. Im heading east, Reacher said. Into Iowa? the front passenger asked. Through Iowa, Reacher said. All the way to Virginia. Hop in, the guy said. Well get you some of the way there. The woman was sitting behind the front passenger, so Reacher tracked around the trunk and got in on the drivers side. He settled on the rear bench and closed the door. The woman nodded to him a little shyly. A little cautiously, maybe. Perhaps because of his busted nose. Maybe the sight upset her. The guy at the wheel checked his mirror and took off up the ramp. Revue de presse The indomitable Reacher burns up the pages. USA Today Furious action . . . [Lee] Child keeps the pacing swift and the surprises rolling. . . . [A] feverishly thrilling series. The Miami Herald Smart, breathless . . . [with] one of the best female characters in the whole Reacher series. The New York Times Subtle and nuanced [with] seductive writing and irresistible plot twists. Newsweek