

UNSTOPPABLE

NOWHERE TO RUN



JUDE WATSON

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PROLOGUE

Somewhere off the coast of Maine

There was only one house on the island. The rest was pine forest, a thick, dark, bristling screen that threw the beach into shadow for most of the sunlit summer days. It also concealed most of the buildings, the three pools—outdoor, indoor, and lap—the tennis courts, the helipad, the landing strip, and the four-car garage from any passing sailboat. Only tourists came close. The locals knew better.

They knew the muscled men in tight black T-shirts in the fast rubber boats who would cut your fishing line or blare a warning with a horn that could make your eardrums bleed.

They knew the treacherous currents, too. They knew how the wind seemed to whip through the channel at a speed and ferocity that you didn't feel in the harbor. They knew to stay away.

The sound of a violin soared through the still air. A sixteen-year-old girl watched her fingers moving

without error, notes sliding and falling like pure water. What used to confound her now flowed. She knew that if she worked at her skill she could succeed, even though she had no talent.

That's what her father tells her.

The thirteen-year-old boy just defeated his tennis pro in straight sets without breaking a sweat. He saw the surprise on the coach's face. Just wait until the guy found out he was fired. The boy's dad always fires a coach after he's been defeated.

They lack the killer instinct, his father said. You want to turn out like that?

He whacked the tennis ball hard, sending it back over the net. The coach had bent down to retrieve his bag, and the ball slammed into his back. Ow. That must have *hurt*. The boy knew it well from experience.

"Never turn your back on a competitor!" the boy jeered.

That's what his father tells him.

Killer instinct.

Far out to sea, a man was swimming, moving as precisely and tirelessly as a machine. Even though he had three pools, he preferred swimming in the open sea. This year the seals had been swimming closer and closer to shore. This meant, he knew, that the great white sharks were lurking close, moving constantly in order to feed.

It added a certain . . . spice to the swim.

The man reached the dock with several powerful

strokes. He hauled himself up and strode toward the house. A short but powerfully muscled man in a black T-shirt tossed him a towel, and he wiped his face and threw it on the ground. He did not worry about towels. They were picked up, laundered, and stacked again. He didn't have to see it or think about it. He was always thinking great thoughts now. Thoughts large and complex enough to take in the world.

He entered through the French doors into the den. He almost recoiled from the sight of hundreds of glassy eyes staring at him. His wife was arranging and rearranging her collection. Again. He hurried past before she had a chance to talk to him.

His office was cool and quiet. He pulled on a terry-cloth robe and activated the many transparent screens. Data flashed by, and he absorbed it all quickly and completely. Things were so different now. His strategic thinking was almost as fast as the computer data streaking across his screens.

Almost there. So close he could taste it.

There are only two people alive on the planet who can stop it.

It's time to eliminate them.

Somewhere near Mt. Washington, New Hampshire

In the small town where the men occasionally went for supplies, their story was that they were on a corporate retreat, testing their skills in the wilderness. The

men—they were all men—looked remarkably alike. They were all fit and muscular with close-cropped hair. They usually wore track pants and T-shirts, or hiking gear. They were friendly, but not forthcoming. After they left, the shopkeeper or gas station attendant would realize that they were hard to tell apart. They had names that were hard to distinguish: Joe, Frank, John, Mike.

Over a hundred men had been shifted into and out of the camp, but for the past four weeks the group had been whittled down to six. Six of the best, six of the brightest, six of the most trustworthy.

They had always been in shape; that was their job. But this last month they'd doubled their strength and then doubled it again. They had climbed the mountain fourteen times. They attended classes in combat driving, surveillance, and martial arts. They had been fitted for Italian suits, handmade shoes with rubber soles, and jackets with pockets that will hold their weaponry close and without detection.

They were ready. They just didn't know for what.

All they knew was that they had never felt so powerful. So at the top of their game.

As they sat on hard chairs watching their screens flash with a simulated escape from a metropolitan area, the leader of the men heard the chime of a text. He was the tallest, and the tannest. His teeth were very white and even; his real teeth had been knocked out in a bar fight years ago in Corsica. His face registered no

emotion as he told the rest that it was time to mobilize. They had received their targets.

He connected his phone to the computer. On a large transparent screen floated two photographs.

“Target One, Target Two,” he said in a flat tone.

The men showed no emotion. Even though their targets were kids.