



## Dark Rivers of the Heart

*Dean Koontz*

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## **Dark Rivers of the Heart** Dean Koontz

Do you dare step through the red door?

Spencer Grant had no idea what drew him to the bar with the red door. He thought he would just sit down, have a slow beer or two, and talk to a stranger. He couldn't know that it would lead to a narrow escape from a bungalow targeted by a SWAT team. Or that it would leave him a wanted man. Now he is on the run from mysterious and ruthless men. He is in love with a woman he knows next to nothing about. And he is hiding from a past he can't fully remember. On his trail is a shadowy security agency that answers to no one--including the U.S. government--and a man who considers himself a compassionate Angel of Death. But worst of all, Spencer Grant is on a collision course with inner demons he thought he'd buried years ago--inner demons that could destroy him if his enemies don't first.

## **Dark Rivers of the Heart Details**

Date : Published August 1st 2000 by Bantam (first published 1994)

ISBN : 9780553582895

Author : Dean Koontz

Format : Paperback 582 pages

Genre : Horror, Fiction, Thriller

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## From Reader Review Dark Rivers of the Heart for online ebook

### Dustin Crazy little brown owl says

*On the road that I have taken,  
one day, walking, I awaken,  
amazed to see where I have come,  
where I'm going, where I'm from.*

-The Book of Counted Sorrows

I didn't really like this when I first read it 2006. I tried to re-read it with the Koontzland - Dean Koontz group in 2011, when it was chosen as a group read but I just couldn't get into it so I put it aside. In 2017, I successfully completed Dark Rivers of the Heart with the Koontzland - Dean Koontz Group. I must admit that this is among the most solid and formidable novels by Dean Koontz. I still don't consider it one of my personal favorites, but I appreciate the work.

In the Koontz Universe, everything is connected & I typically pick up on connections carried between Dean Koontz novels. I can't think of another Dean Koontz novel that is filled with more references & similarities than Dark Rivers - there are shadows of other sagas including Dean's most recent novel THE SILENT CORNER. There are so many novels that connect to Dark Rivers that I shouldn't even attempt to list them, but here are a few: The Silent Corner, Hideaway, The Door to December, Velocity, The Key to Midnight, The Face, The Mask, Dragon Tears, Relentless etc.

### Favorite Passages:

*Wednesday night, he had stepped through an invisible doorway that separated his lifelong reality from another place. In this new reality, Valerie was his destiny. Once found, she would be a magic lens that would forever alter his vision. All that was mysterious would become clear, but things long known and understood would become mysterious once more.*

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*His heart had been pounding with a strange jubilation, as though he desperately wanted to encounter something paranormal, even if it proved hostile, rather than return to a life without wonder.*

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*On clear nights, the Rocky Mountain sky was deeper than eternity, deeper even than the mind could imagine, and starlight sparkled in the icicles.*

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### Brett says

Here is more junk from Dean  
This book makes me feel unclean  
It's a bloated waste of time  
It's a bother to make this rhyme  
--the Book of Counted Sorrows

We may as well start with that title, Dark Rivers of the Heart. Melodrama much? You can practically hear the 1980s saxophone solo reverberating through the title. It's a harbinger of things to come.

The story opens with our protagonist, Spencer, stalking a woman. She was the waitress at the bar the previously night, who chatted with him. Spencer has returned the following evening, and is distressed to find out she's not at work. So distressed, in fact, he decides he should drive to her house and check on her. He creeps around and doesn't see her. When she doesn't answer the door, he breaks in and starts taking a look at her stuff and trying to learn about her.

Though Koontz is at pains to try to frame this as normal and good behavior, I guess I have to point out that it's not. It is, in fact, extremely scary and an awful thing to do. Spencer has great difficulty understanding appropriate boundaries and there is no question his behavior is criminal. He deserves to go to prison right away.

Spencer is your basic arch-Koontzian hero type. It's the only type that Koontz writes. He is a Very Good Man with a Dark Secret. The woman that Spencer is doing his best to terrorize at the beginning of the novel is Ellie. She is also the stock Koontz type of love interest: faultless, hyper-competent (able, for instance, to commandeer foreign defense satellites from a laptop computer in a car in 1994, because...hacking), also with a mysterious and painful past. We also get the obligatory Koontz dog, which is contractually required to include in each story.

Spencer and Ellie get wrapped up in a plot that involves a clandestine government agency the employs a sadistic bureaucrat willing to torture and kill in the name of a misplaced, vaguely liberal ideology. Might as well spend a minute on our villains here as well. Roy, our main bad guy, likes to kill people in the name of empathy. For instance, if someone is in a wheelchair, he may shoot them because he feels so sad for them. I'm sure this is supposed to be a skewering take on PC liberal values, though it is, uh, dumb as hell. There is also a beautiful woman whose main quality is that she is ambitious and enjoys self-pleasure, and [obligatory spoiler warning] a surprise last minute bad guy whose "art" involves seeing beauty in the pain of others. The spoiler warning is truly unnecessary, since 100% of readers of the book will see the twist a mile away.

The novel is simultaneously rote and extraordinarily long-winded. It's over 550 pages when it easily could have been 350. In the middle sections, I frequently experienced *déjà vu*, reading the endless chase sequences again and again.

Now is the part of the review where I really slide in pedantism and quote parts of the book at you, for you experience the majesty yourself:

Page 83, [our hero Spenser is talking to a restaurant owner/landlord who is a Mysterious Asian with Deep Insights]:

"After a pause, with his eyes still hidden by the patterns of reflected color that glimmered in his eyeglasses, he continued: 'The larger a government, the more likely it is to be riddle with such covert organizations—some small but some not. We have a very big government, Mr. Grant.'

'Yes, but—'

"Direct and indirect taxes require the average citizen to work from January until the middle of July to pay for that government. Then working men and women begin to labor for themselves."

Ok, first of all, this statistic is complete bullshit. Secondly, look how much Koontz is awkwardly trying to shoehorn his email forward political ideas into the story. It completely kills any momentum in terms of character or plot. This is both bad politics and bad writing.

Koontz does a very similar thing on page 309, where he interrupts his (previously alluded to) story about commandeering a spy satellite to interject some garbage about EPA: "The EPA cooperated so successfully with the Department of Justice that a citizen who even inadvertently contaminated protected wetlands was at risk of spending more time in prison than would a doped-up gangsta dude who killed a 7-Eleven clerk, a pregnant mother, two nuns, and a kitten while he was stealing forty dollars and a Mars bar." Ho-ho! Koontz really hitting the bad writing jackpot with being stupid, unfunny, and killing story momentum all at once.

These are a couple of examples but the book is littered with this nonsense. Usually these are dressed up, like the EPA comment, as "funny" side commentaries. They're the kinds of things your uninformed grandpa might say. Maybe it doesn't bother you, but it certainly is a distraction for me. Authors that want to engage with social issues are great—but you have a responsibility to make some effort to accurately describe reality.

At the conclusion of the book, Spenser and Ellie have evaded capture from an all-powerful, high-tech quasi-governmental unit and are on the run. Rather than trying to find somewhere to hide out, Spenser convinces Ellie to stop by the old farm where he grew up and had a traumatic experience as child. This moment, he decides for some apparent reason, is when he wants to go back and try to remember the events of the past, which he conveniently has amnesia-ed out of his brain.

I'm tired of writing this review and I'm sure you're tired of reading it, if you've gotten this far.

There's no reason, plot-wise, that he should want to stop off at the old place, but Koontz needs to tidy up the end of the book by having him confront all of his old demons in both literal and metaphorical senses. The place is chosen for symbolic value, even though it makes no sense in a variety of ways.

No moral ambiguity is allowed to exist—the bad guys are very bad and our good guy is completely good (at this point, we are expected to have forgotten about his breaking and entering and stalking from the first part of the book.). Justice is supposedly served and everybody lives happily ever after.

We also get a whole other side-plot forced into the last part of the book about some kind of network of resistance fighters, but you don't want to hear about it and I don't want to write about it. It is just as bad as the rest of it.

I've read and reviewed a lot of Koontz in my time, often being very hard on him. However, the last few books of his I read prior to this, I took it a little easier and tried to be more forgiving. I don't have that forgiveness in me this time around. This book is an offense. It's as bad as his worst work dating back to his early novels. It's called *Dark Rivers of the Heart*, but it makes me think Koontz has dark rivers in his brain.

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### **Adam Burton says**

Ugh. I tried, really tried to like this. A number of friends, whom I consider readers of taste, recommended Koontz. I listened to an audiobook of this. Bleah. I mean, the plot was interesting enough to keep me until the end of the story, but the writing was god-awful. The style kept changing between a stereotypical "taut thriller" no-frills Hemingwayesque voice and this bizarre, baroque, almost delirious pseudo-poetry. Maybe

that was a conscious technique (I hope so for his sake), but I found it jarring and off-putting. Perhaps Koontz has others that are better, but I'm not inclined to seek them out.

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### **Tricia Douglas says**

It's been a while since I've read a Dean Koontz novel. I don't know how I could have missed this one! Spencer Grant has a mysterious past that the reader only slowly learns about. He is in love with a woman he knows little about and is being chased by people who want him dead. This book is fast-paced and exciting. Every chapter adds more depth to the story and builds on the character of Spencer Grant and his violent past. I think I need to go back and reread more of Koontz's novels. Excellent writer!

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### **Shaun says**

GREAT READ! This one comes highly recommended. also check out From the Corner of His Eye Large Print and Life Expectancy After this sample you will be hooked and will surely want more. This Koontz addiction is like crack.

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### **wally says**

heh heh!

there's a blurb, one of many, from the orlando sentinel: "as it appears, george orwell was ten years late, and it is left to dean koontz to add the finishing touches to an orwellian future that is here and now. one of his best novels."

i chuckle because of so many takes i've read from others who flam-beau koontz for his vision...ha ha ha ha! i mean, i've often wondered if when our elected newbies get to where they're going if they're not taken into a room, w/o any windows or doors....work w/me...and they're introduced to our handlers, shape-changers who in turn change them, into something acceptable.

great story, some sci-fi elements, big-chase elements, powers-beyond-our-control elements...a great dog, rocky, who is built for speed and enjoys it as well. big black chrysler limousines, helicopters.

spencer and valerie, right, they meet by chance. valerie is more than a waitress in a cocktail lounge. and spencer has a past that plays a part. "he had good reason not to dwell on the past." (an idea that comes back a time or two in many of koontz's stories, like his latest novella/novel, 2010...what's it call?....shoot me) mormons and guys in suits, hardware in armpits. nice, too, the idea that is also present in other koontz stories, a kind of network of resistance.

i know i've read this one at least twice, probably three times. well worth one read.

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### **Karen San Diego says**

Definitely my most favorite book - Koontz or not.

Critics of this book (I have just read some of the reviews) are quite understandable. I am a Filipino, but I am also a patronizer of the American politics. Many may say I do not know much, for I don't live under the American government, but they must also remember that this novel is not based on a true story. It's fiction, and everything is real and possible in a work of fiction. They can't criticize a fiction novel using reality as a basis, it's going to be more of an opinion than a neutral review.

Dark Rivers of the Heart is one of the greatest pieces ever written by Dean Koontz. The first part of the novel opens with the story of a young man Spencer Grant who is tormented by the past, which he keeps escaping. After meeting a mysterious young lady Valerie Keene, and gets enchanted by her at first sight, he becomes consumed by the need to "find a life". When Keene does not appear the next night, he comes to her house only to get caught up in an electrifying assault by mysterious armed men; and eventually feels the need to find her and help her, whoever she is.

In this story, the virtue of freedom, the grip of faith and the power of love - with a lesson that will make you understand the meaning of past and its connection with fate - Koontz has made another flawless masterpiece that will surely make your heart race and fall in love at the same time.

Dark Rivers of the Heart is a package by the way - techno-thriller, suspense, comedy, romance and drama. You will never regret reading. Definitely his best chase novel.

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### **Julie Powell says**

This story is meant to be fiction and yet the more time that passes, the more real this chilling account of the world is, not only believable, but also fact...now in 2017.

Corruption is rife, laws are beneficial for those in charge and power has twisted the hearts of those who have it.

It was a long book and I was surprised by the numerous typos, however, the characters were great, and much of the dialogue between Spencer and Ellie was brilliant and funny (as I expect from this author), and Rocky's personality was both charming and sad. The villains were perfectly awful; just as they should. So, together with the suspenseful plot and psychological explorations, this made for a compelling read.

Hope - yes, let's hope.

Highly recommended.

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### **Tina says**

2,5 \*

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## **Patrick Kiernan says**

A good story but far too long this was the second group read for Koontzland

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## **Maciek says**

Dark Rivers of the Heart (1994)

There's really not much that could be said about "Dark Rivers" that hasn't been said. It doesn't really break any new background; if you've read Koontz before you won't be surprised by anything.

The protagonist, Spencer Grant (who of course has a haunted past) travels with his dog Rocky (who has good reasons not to dwell on the past too) in search of a woman, Valerie, whom he fell in love with...after chatting with her for 20 minutes in a bar. Spencer arrives at the Red Door, the place where he met her, but she's not there so he goes to break into her house. Of course Valerie has mysterious past too, because at her place some kind of SWAT team surprises Spencer and he has to go on the run.

The first biggest problem with "Dark Rivers" is that it's very dated. Koontz spends a lot of time describing the wonderful new technology - Spencer is astonished when Valerie's computer has 10 gigabytes of disk space - but for the modern reader it's ultimately boring. Page after page is spent on descriptions of laptops, hacking, computer access all cutting edge circa 1993.

The second biggest problem is Koontz's concern with the Asset Forfeiture laws. He devotes a whole sub-plot which takes quite a lot of space to talk how the US Government can steal property from an individual with absolute impunity. All of this horror (exaggerated or not) was made obsolete in 2000 by the Civil Asset Forfeiture Reform Act. Besides, with the privacy of American citizens being threatened by the Patriot Act...Asset Forfeiture doesn't look that big of a deal.

The third biggest problem, which might be the biggest of them all, is the helplessly bad ending which Koontz yet again pulled straight out from his butt. I've read much about how this book was "Dark" and the ending "bleak", but it turned out not to be the case. Koontz did write some fun chase scenes here but totally screwed the final confrontation, making it anticlimactic, lazy and idiotic.

"Dark Rivers" is quite long, but for most it's fast paced and enjoyable, if you can turn off your brain and pretend not to notice the bad dialogue and usual Koontz cliches.

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## **Bob says**

Dark Rivers of the Heart is a monumental test of human endurance. It gets so boring by the halfway point that any sane reader would drink liquid cyanide before bringing themselves to finish this book. At first it seems interesting. Agency and high tech stuff, what could go wrong? Everything. I wouldn't be surprised if the editor face rolled the keyboard somewhere near page 562. The combination of this book's terrible quality and it being a required reading, with deadlines, creates a nightmare for the English student. It causes one to

reconsider their faith in God, as how could He have let this tragedy happen to you? Throughout the book, the protagonist talks to his dog as a way to clear his thoughts. It is obvious that he considers the pet to be his intellectual superior. The same seems to apply to the author. He had enough creative ideas for perhaps 75 pages, but decided that he wanted to make a 600 page book, and so resorted to filling the remaining 525 pages with both human and canine diarrhea. The characters are one-dimensional robots that have no reason to act the way they do, although some invisible deity forces their actions in order to make a story. It simply doesn't make sense to go up against a powerful and evil organisation just because you want to help a random girl you talked to one night at a bar. You might say that since it's a techno thriller, the reader should be more lenient towards subhuman characters. That could be so, if the technology was any good. Unfortunately, the technology presented in the book is deserving of aleph-two facepalms. Nobody's impressed with 5 KB of memory, Koontz, so please stop bragging about it in the book. Although such things seem minor at the beginning of the book, when Koontz invests most of his 75 pages of creative material, they become the sole focus of the book when the book progresses and the author runs out of plot. The junk food I ate while procrastinating reading this book filled dark rivers in my heart. I expect Koontz to pay for my heart surgery 60 years down the road.

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### **Rebecca McNutt says**

Pretty good book, Dean Koontz usually writes very interesting novels. :)

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### **Maria says**

Dean Koontz has done it again. I have a love/hate relationship with most of his books. He reaches out and grabs you by the throat and drags you through the white-knuckle adventure and doesn't let you go until the last page. His writing is so much more spell-binding than other people in his genre. The "hate" part is that I can't get anything done when I'm engrossed in his books. My business goes to pot, my house doesn't get cleaned. And after I escape, wrung-out and exhausted, I look around and am overwhelmed with all the stuff I DIDN'T get done while I was under his spell.

This book is no exception. There are a few things that might have been left out. Maybe a few minor details, but mostly it was perfection and I was left being paranoid of the power the government has over our lives, and it wouldn't take much of a stretch for this novel to be a true story.

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### **Jordan Lombard says**

Could not put this down. It had me on the edge of my seat all the way through. I also appreciated that the ending was realistic, and that not everything was tied up in a neat little bow.

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### **Siobhan says**

I'm a massive Koontz fan, I love pretty much every book I have read by him, yet I am of the firm belief that his older work is much better than his more recent work. I admit that the Odd Thomas series is my favourite,

but collectively his older work scores higher ratings than his more recent work – for me, that is.

So, that means you're going to hear a number of the same comments about this one as with his other work.

As always, Koontz creates a collection of great characters (yep, even those with mysterious pasts) and throws them into a truly gripping story. I confess that this one started slower than some of his other books, but once the ball is rolling it does not stop. A faced paced suspenseful read, it has everything that Koontz has to offer: his usual charms of pulling at our emotions, leaving us second guessing, questions arising only to be answered at the right moments... basically the old school Koontz package.

Overall, another great old school Koontz. Whilst not my favourite by the author it is a great way to remind me of what he is truly capable of.

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### **Daniella says**

This book is made of fail.

I tried three separate times to finish reading *Dark Rivers*, but unfortunately, it simply couldn't hold my interest. At first, it seemed to have all the ear-marks of a fun, fast-paced, suspenseful read. A man with a dark secret; a mysterious woman on the run from a secret, amoral government agency; a sociopathic serial killer cum secret government agent hot on their trail--all in all, this book could have been good. Hell, with its incorporation of high technology and conspiracy theorist undertones, it could have even been great.

*Dark Rivers*, however, failed to meet even my lowest expectations. Between Koontz' stunted and oft-awkward prose combined with (or perhaps stemming from) poor word choice, and his long-winded, drawn-out descriptions of events, reading this book became a chore after the first fifty or so pages. Not only did it feel at times like he was simply writing to fill up space, drawing out each event or description as much as possible rather than reworking the material to create a longer, more intensive plotline, his insistence on dragging out the final revelation regarding the protagonist's "dark secret" was quite frankly irritating. I found it especially irritating because Koontz employed liberal use of pseudo-stylistic flashbacks in order to relate this terrible secret to the reader, yet he eventually revealed said secret within the normal course of the narrative, making the final, protracted flashback sequences somewhat superfluous and unnecessary.

I could go on, but I think those few points are sufficient to explain my loathing of this book.

So, in conclusion, *Dark Rivers* isn't worth the paper it's printed on, or the time it takes to read it. I would recommend it only to avid Koontz fans who will read anything he churns out, regardless of whether it's actually good, and also to aspiring authors who wish to learn what NOT to do, because this book stands as a prime example of why "churners" do a disservice to the art of writing.

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### **Janille N G says**

8/18/2017

Someone literally left this book on a table by my desk at work and said ANYONE could take it! I was like, Ummmm, okay, that book's mine now...because I am, naturally, a book hoarder (and really, no one else at my

work wanted it because it just sat on that table all day, which is inexplicable to me -- who wouldn't want a FREE BOOK?!?!. So, now it's sitting on my desk, just waiting to be read...at some point...when I dig myself out of the pile of books I have to be read at home.

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## **Johnny says**

This book has been a longtime favorite. It's more of a straightforward thriller, similar to Koontz's recent high-concept novels, but far more thoroughly worked out. There's a level of depth that signifies an old-style Koontz. I've read this novel several times, but during this second reading of the original English text I noticed that nothing he writes is mere filling; everything matters.

The novel chapters switch between the pro- and antagonist, but without a change in verb tense as he does in later novels; the use of the present tense, however, is still used for small flashbacks.

Koontz really puts us off on the wrong foot with these characters. What we at first would consider good guys suddenly commit criminal (and even violent) acts right after their introduction.

Spencer Grant, the main character, is introduced after he has already met his female counterpart, which is different from Koontz's usual tactics of letting these characters' first meeting be witnessed by the reader. When Grant goes back to the cocktail lounge where the woman works, she appears to have vanished. All Grant's next moves are in function of finding her again. Thanks to his computer hacking skills – though he's certainly far more than just a nerd, as soon becomes obvious – he locates her address and finds himself inside her home. The good guy turned creepy stalker soon drops back in his original role by what happens next, however. And of course Koontz connoisseurs should never doubt the righteousness of a character accompanied by a loveable canine.

The other bit of misdirection concerns Roy Miro, the main villain of the piece, who is introduced helping out a woman with car trouble. He changes her tire, being gentlemanly all the way, only to follow the same path as Spencer Grant afterwards: he looks up her address, finds her at home and kills her and her husband. In contrast to Grant, Miro stays evil and his actions will turn him into a memorable Koontz villain. For some reason I've always pictured him as a grown up Roy Borden of "The Voice of the Night" fame.

I already mentioned the dog in this piece. Rocky is more than just a companion to the main character; he's really a full-grown character of his own and even though he can't talk, he's still capable of participating in dialogues. But apart from many other dogs in Koontz books, Rocky always remains "just a dog". There's no gimmick to elevate him to a higher level of dogginess; no increased intelligence like Einstein of "Watchers", no inner dialogue as with the dog in "Dragon Tears", yet his presence really adds something to the novel besides using him as a plot device.

The second part of the book finally brings the enigmatic and elusive Valerie Keene to the foreground. At this time, the spy games have really kicked off and the story becomes like a Jason Bourne movie. The most memorable thing about this novel, is the use of lots of high-tech spy stuff, using computers in all kinds of ways not only to collect data but to physically locate people as well. For the finale, Koontz takes it one step further and introduces a popular conspiracy theorist's weapon, which might jump the shark a bit (or perhaps better in this case, nuke the fridge) depending on your own level of gullibility.

To prevent the novel from being that straightforward thriller I mentioned, Koontz adds his signature

psychological element concerning Spencer Grant's past, in the form of the previously mentioned flashbacks and by the appearance of a ghost of his childhood – his father who turns out to be a serial killer who also murdered Spencer's mother – which always seemed a bit out of place compared to the rest of the novel, not to mention too convenient for the villains.

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### **Matt Barker says**

Another great book by Dean Koontz. He is quickly becoming one of my favorite authors. The books are great, the humor is welcome, and they usually keep me reading until late into the night.

### **Publisher's Summary**

Spencer Grant had no idea what drew him to the bar with the red door. He thought he would just sit down, have a slow beer or two, and talk to a stranger. He couldn't know that it would lead to a narrow escape from a bungalow targeted by a SWAT team. Or that it would leave him a wanted man.

Now he is on the run from mysterious and ruthless men. He is in love with a woman he knows next to nothing about. And he is hiding from a past he can't fully remember. On his trail is a shadowy security agency that answers to no one, including the U.S. government, and a man who considers himself a compassionate Angel of Death. But worst of all, Spencer Grant is on a collision course with inner demons he thought he'd buried years ago - inner demons that could destroy him if his enemies don't first.

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