



The Counterfeit Agent

Alex Berenson

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“Berenson’s strength is his deep understanding of geopolitics and of the shoddy compromises it demands. He clearly has excellent contacts in the world of shadows. Wells is a complex and satisfying protagonist, tackling bad guys across the world’s conflict zones.”--The New York Times Book Review

John Wells goes undercover as the threat of nuclear war skyrockets between the United States and Iran, in the cutting-edge new novel from the #1 *New York Times*–bestselling author.

In an Istanbul hotel, a deep source warns a CIA agent that Iran intends to kill a CIA station chief. Quickly, John Wells is called in to investigate, but before he can get far, the tip comes true. Which means that the *next* warning the source gives will be taken very seriously indeed. And it’s a big one. *We’ve put a package on a ship from Dubai to the United States. A radioactive one. A bomb? Not yet. It’s a test run.*

As the threat level jumps and the government mobilizes, something still doesn’t smell right to Wells’s old CIA boss Ellis Shafer, and so he sends Wells on a private mission to find out what’s going on. But the two of them are swimming against the tide. From Guatemala to Thailand to Hong Kong to Istanbul, Wells uses every skill he has, including his ability to go undercover in the Arab world, to chase down leads. But it might not be enough. Soon there might be nothing anyone can do to pull the United States back from the brink of war.

The Counterfeit Agent Details

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From Reader Review The Counterfeit Agent for online ebook

Howard Kline says

A disappointment. John Wells, Berenson's hero, largely travels the world one step too late and mostly ineffective. The mastermind behind the conspiracy involved is revealed in the last 20 pages with no hint of his existence prior to that and the lead henchman (a woman) escapes with no discussion of that fact. Clearly Berenson is setting up a sequel which makes me feel cheated.

wally says

nine nineteen ay em the 4th of march 2018 sunday morning finished good read four stars i really liked it kindle library loaner the 8th from berenson for me. been reading them in order and that makes a kind of sense although maybe one could jump around...there is a kind of chronology to them. on to the next now. will say that the business at the end at the old...sewing factory...seemed a bit off, the willing suspension needs to be willing, how it went down. paused. then went with it, okay. see what happens now...hope we see more that kind of thing. and this one touches on another in the series, earlier, that business with the saudi kingdom, that unfinished business. later maybe? we'll see.

MaryG2E says

This book, The Counterfeit Agent, is actually volume 1 of a two part thriller, of which Twelve Days is the second book. I read Twelve Days first, not realising it was the carry-over of an earlier book, and regret that I did not start with this one. Having said that, Twelve Days can be read as a standalone book. It is just that The Counterfeit Agent provides all the background information and prior activities of protagonist John Wells and his associates and enemies.

The premise behind the two volume story is that a wealthy private businessman has set up an elaborate plot to convince the US government to declare war on Iran. Aaron Duberman is a phenomenally rich casino magnate, with a passion for preserving the State of Israel from attacks originating in the Muslim countries, most notably Iran. He recruits the cool, reserved, attractive woman known as Salome as his principal agent, and she sets about establishing networks and creating incidents that will draw the US into a situation whereby it will invade Iran and destroy its nuclear facilities.

On the opposite side, CIA agents and chiefs have been alerted to this unusual spate of incidents, and various characters within the US security forces bring their own perspectives to the dilemma.

In this way, Berenson creates an environment in which his disillusioned, overworked, embittered agent John Wells can pursue the truth, whatever that might be. There is considerable suspense as we read about elusive characters such as Reza, a colonel in Iran's Revolutionary Guard, who seems to be a double agent, and the burnt-out operative, Glenn Mason, who has a key role in convincing the US that the threat from Iran is real.

It is a cleverly crafted novel, which held my attention and kept me guessing. However, I was very peeved at the end of the book that I was left on a cliff-hanger, and that I needed to read the sequel, Twelve Days, to

find out what happens next. (As mentioned above, I personally had read the sequel!) Although several plot lines are tied up nicely by the end, I would have liked a bit more closure. Had I realised the relationship with the two books, I would definitely have tackled The Counterfeit Agent first. Don't get me wrong - I have no beef with two or three part book series. I just wish that the publishers had marketed this book and its companion appropriately, so that I could have made an informed consumer choice. I guess that is the state of play with modern publishing...

Liz says

I consider myself an Alex Berenson fan so it pains me to say that I truly didn't enjoy this book. At times I was slightly bored and for some reason I wasn't very impressed with John this outing. ***** SPOILER ALERT*****

Him walking into that trap was pretty ridiculous. Not sure what the point of that was other than for John to get caught and then dazzle us with how he escapes. The John of old would never have walked into that so brazenly. It almost feels like the character's personality has changed. While he has always been brazen, he's never been stupid. That move seemed dumb to me.

The Anne thing was pretty much a repeat of Exley. Not sure what the point of that was either. In addition, I'm not sure why but I almost didn't care about him this book. And the introduction on the last ten pages or so of the real villain felt lubricious, rushed and almost an insult to the readers intelligence. If this book was going to roll into another- fine. But at least introduce, insinuate, or set up the villain so we actually care or are shocked by the connection/implications. He introduces a villain that we have no idea exists or why and we are supposed to be left with a cliff-hanger. Worst of all for me was Wells ambivalence toward the woman. It felt a little sexist. In previous outings, John will scorch the earth to erase a villain. This woman calmly drugged him, kidnaped him, was clearly in control and he wasn't even really bothered. Actually drove by her. I like this character but it was almost like he didn't have a personality...hard to explain. Lastly, the fact that there was no mention of any Iranian official contacting the White House or Langley to refute the charges was a bit far-fetched to me. Guess that will be left for the next book.

While I appreciated the research and connections to real-life events, at time it felt a little preachy and not so much non-fiction. I like to stretch the idea of plausibility when reading in this genre but when you are blasted with events/themes/people that are real it blurs the lines between fiction and non-fiction.

I usually devour Berenson's book's from publication day but this time I struggled to get through it within two weeks. Glad this was a library loan. As the next one will be.....

Mal Warwick says

The modern history of Iran and the US is fraught with conflict. Today, Americans vilify the ayatollahs who have governed Iran since its revolution in 1979. We're all too likely to forget (assuming we ever knew in the first place) that the Iranian Revolution was in large part a consequence of the CIA operation to overthrow the elected prime minister of the country in 1953.

Then, a CIA task force led by Theodore Roosevelt's grandson, Kermit Roosevelt Jr., engineered the removal

of the secular democrat Mohammad Mossadegh. That enabled Iran's monarch, Shah Reza Pahlevi, to reverse the nationalization of Western oil firms and assert his control of the Iranian people in increasingly brutal ways for nearly three decades. The Iran hostage crisis in the American Embassy in Tehran in 1979 was merely the first of a long string of conflicts between the two countries, some of which involved small-scale open warfare.

Alex Berenson's *The Counterfeit Agent* is one of two novels in his John Wells series that is set against the background of this ongoing high-stakes struggle. In a typically suspenseful tale, Wells takes on a rogue ex-CIA agent to head off war with Iran. Unfortunately, this is the first of two novels, and it ends with a cliffhanger. I enjoyed the book, but I would have enjoyed it more if I hadn't unwittingly read the sequel first. The second of the novels, *Twelve Days*, opens with Iran and the US on the brink of war, exactly as the first had ended.

Like all the books in the John Wells series, *The Counterfeit Agent* rockets from one locale to another. The story unfolds in South Africa, Istanbul, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Manila, Panama City, and Phuket (Thailand) as well as several locations within the United States. Clearly, Berenson is drawing on his own travels, at least some of them while working as a reporter for the New York Times. The descriptions of the foreign locales reek of authenticity.

Mark says

This was my first John Wells novel, he being the violent but effective spy and protagonist. And like other readers who weighed in on Berenson's website, there is some confusion at the end of this book, because it wraps up with several unresolved issues, making it feel like a sequel has to come along.

But even if there isn't a followup, this was an enjoyable ride. We learn early on that a woman of unknown origin is collecting nuclear weapons grade material as part of some deep project she is working on, and later, that she recruits a disgraced CIA operative to be her heavy lifter. In the meantime, an Iranian who won't give his identity starts to leak details of upcoming attacks on embassies and people, and when they come true, the American government goes into overdrive, thinking it's a plot by Iran and that Iran has gotten much further developing a nuclear weapon than it had believed.

John Wells is recruited to look into this freelance by the ex-CIA director, now a senator, and an old friend in the agency, and it is his dogged persistence that will eventually crack the case -- although, with the up in the air ending, it's not certain what the resolution will be.

Berenson is a master at plotting, his characters seems believable, and Wells is just reckless enough that he doesn't seem completely invincible. If there is a sequel, I'll probably grab it.

L.A. Starks says

Berenson has written another well-researched, high-action thriller. The relationship twists feel real and there is the clear promise of a sequel.

One of the things I most enjoy about Berenson's books is the consistent excellence of his plots and dialogue.

Mr. Gottshalk says

Look, I am going to read all the John Wells books because I love action and espionage. This one took way too long to develop. I was forced to read about these characters all over the place plotting something evil with only a little bit of our hero, John Wells, until the second half of the book. There were chapters that limped along because I didn't care, and there were others that were easy to picture in my mind because THINGS WERE HAPPENING! Middle of the road read; three stars all the way.

Stephanie says

It's not like I go out of my way to dislike a book. If you take a look of the books I've been reading the past few years, the majority have been 2-star or 3-star ratings. This is an issue.

After a quick thought, literally just this second, I asked myself what do I love in a book. It comes down to three things:

- 1). character
- 2). plot
- 3). writing

I usually like tragic characters. I'm sure you can do a whole psychological profile on me based on that. Which should be no surprise when I say that I found Glenn Mason to be the most interesting character and the most I wanted to read about. This emotional, yet on-the-verge-of-being-a-psychopath, (is that possible?), was the most dynamic character. His ladylove's version of events was pretty chilling, especially when compared to his version of events.

It was a surprise to me when I saw that this was a "John Wells" book. Uh, who??

John Wells was the dullest character. Maybe not dullest - no. The most typical agent character there could be. He's badass, but he's getting old, he's undecided whether he wants to continue his job or settle down with his pick of the month . . .

There are plenty of dull characters in this book. Many did not need to be in this book. Like the President. Or at least his view points. It was excessive and unnecessary.

Salome is cool. I love a femme-fatale. But each time I saw her name, I kept thinking of *True Blood's* Salome. That's not anyone's fault. They're pretty similar in character, though.

I'm flexible with plot if it has either good characters, or great writing. On it's own, it has to be either intricate, fast-paced, or unexpected, or some combination, for me to really like it. The plot of this book was relatively simple: an unknown person or group of persons is trying to cause unnecessary shit to happen in the world, and it's up to everyone else to figure it out. This is fine.

I love lyrical or poetic writing. Obviously in action-novel? like this, what matters more are characters and plot. Because there were so many (of the same) characters to consider, and because the plot was so simple, it felt as though I was reading the same chapters over and over again. It just dragged on, and I found myself wishing I could skip useless sections before I read them and found out they were useless (e.g. the President's speech thing).

I didn't like how in the beginning of the book we are introduced to each new character in each new chapter for like, 8 chapters. Okay, I'm exaggerating, but it gave me the same vibes when I started to read *The Hobbit* for the first time and I was put off with the thought that I had to remember all of the dwarves' names and what color caps they wore. Honestly, they all blended into one another.

I forgot that this was book #8. This is the first "John Wells" book I've read, so don't take what I said too seriously.

Jeffrey says

Alex Berenson's singular talent, ably demonstrated in the previous 7 John Wells novels, is the ability to build up a convincing world scenario. From the Arabian peninsula, to the jungles of Africa, Berenson is able to find a new story that rings true and believable. Then Wells is cast out there to use his talents, smarts, spycraft and muscular violence to winnow out the truth. Like the real world, John Wells does not always succeed. There are losses of life and of innocence. Berenson, however, seems to have a handle on the world's hot spots and can ably write about Muslims in Arabia, pirates in Africa or a girl with a reed thin voice trying to survive in South America.

The buildup in "The Counterfeit Agent" is very impressive. Berenson outdoes himself in putting together a convincing conspiracy. An unknown ruthless female agent has purchased weapon grade material for a bomb. She has hired a rouge ex spy and put together a hit squad. An America spy in Istanbul, Brian Taylor, has been approached by a Reza, a mysterious Irani, with secrets to tell about his country's plans against America, and the secrets Reza spills are coming true. Could Iran really be thinking of attacking the United States?

Wells, who frets about his now 40 year old body, taking extra time on the shooting range, and doing the kind of exercising that the rest of us dream about, needs a respite from real life. He has proposed to his girlfriend, but she wants him to give up the spy life and gives him 30 days to figure out what he wants.

Enter Vinny Duto, the ex head of the CIA, who is now a Senator. Duto has learned from an old contact in South America that someone is targeting a CIA Station Chief for assassination. He and Ellis Shafer, who is still at the CIA, dispatch Wells to see if the plot is real and the hunt is on.

There is one great scene near the end of the novel where Wells must use every bit of his wits and muscles to extract himself from a tough situation, but the end of the novel ends on a cliffhanger, with America poised on the doorstep of war and a major player unmasked in an "aha" moment, without much in the way of setup. It is the type of neat solution that is the hallmark of a lazy writer, not one of the scope of Berenson, and detracts from the overall story.

The "Counterfeit Agent" is a good book, but not among Berenson's best.

Amy Lignor says

The woman is called Salome. Flying into Johannesburg, South Africa, she is there to arrange for a sale of Uranium-235. Working for a secret agency that no one knows exists, Salome understands her mission; the

purpose of getting the U-235 is to trick the American government into bombing Iran. And that's just the first plot gift from this incredible author.

John Wells works for the CIA, another secret bunch of folks who slither around in the dark. Currently on a cruise with his significant other, he is about to propose marriage when his girlfriend makes a counteroffer: Stop working for the CIA or the romance is over. Sadly for Mr. Wells' love life, Vincent Duto, who recently left his post as CIA Director to take a seat in the U.S. Senate, calls precisely at this awkward moment to send John out on assignment. Apparently the CIA has gotten a tip that there will be an attack on a Station Chief, and Iran is the location at the top of his list.

Not only does the attack happen, but this anonymous tipster moves on to state that Iran is about to smuggle nuclear materials into the United States. This is kind of hard to believe, but John is picked to look into the information to see if it's legitimate.

Wells finds himself out there on his own, which is usual, facing problem after problem and attempting to get to the truth. A one-man army, he must get in and out of locations and situations that would cause any normal detective, agent, or other various spy to quit the 'job' immediately. But as the action progresses and secrets are uncovered about everything from what goes on at Langley to a woman who's definitely an intellectual equal to Wells, the story provides thrill after thrill.

Although there is a series featuring the incredible John Wells, this book definitely stands alone. Every once in a while a book will come along that is so good it can't be put down; this is that book!

Jim A says

Until the end game, Berenson could have written this same novel without using the Wells character and still had a hell of a book.

Duto, the former head of the CIA, is now a senator. Ellis Schaeffer, Wells' friend and former handler from the CIA, is showing his age. The three of them are trying to find a former CIA agent gone rogue and working a false flag attempt at creating a war between Iran and the U.S.

It's the first Wells novel that I can remember having an ending indicating there is more to follow. Using Berenson's normal gap between books, I won't get an answer for another year.

Jay Deb says

Fun read and unrelenting actions. The story moves at lightning speed with bodies falling every now and then. John Wells is faced with a conundrum in his personal life yet he takes up a very difficult assignment.

Bob says

Just Okay -- And Several Notches Below The Early Books In This Series!

The Counterfeit Agent is the seventh book in the John Wells series, which has become very formulaic. While it is moderately entertaining, it is far less interesting, suspenseful, well-plotted, and much less of a page-turner than most of the early book in the series. As a matter of fact, it wasn't until its last 40 or 50 pages that The Counterfeit Agent generated any real thrills -- and then the book just ended without any "conclusion!" That is, to be continued in the sequel to follow in about a year or so.

Further on a comparative basis, The Counterfeit Agent falls considerably short in terms of dimensionalizing his main character and particularly his supportive characters; to the point that readers who have not read most of this author's previous books might feel they don't know the characters well enough to care much about what happens to them.

After my, at best, moderate satisfaction with The Counterfeit Agent and steady decline in satisfaction with each book in this series, Alex Berenson has now dropped from being one of my "don't miss" authors to "a let's wait and see what others think first" authors.

Alex Cantone says

In South Africa, a mysterious woman negotiates for a shipment. In Istanbul, CIA case officer Brain Taylor is approached by a man named "Reza", of the Iranian Republican Guard, with information on the Iranian nuclear weapons program. In Philadelphia, former head of the CIA, Senator Vinnie Duto receives a message from a Colombian national Montoya, who he "ran" while he was station chief in Bogota, years before.

Neither Duto nor his former deputy Ellis Shafer are in favour within the current structure of the CIA, sending their "ghost" operative John Wells to Guatemala City to meet Montoya. The Colombian has intelligence to trade: he was approached by an American named "Hank", recruiting a "team" for covert operations. He and Peruvian Eduardo Nuñez, also approached, worked for a Mexican cartel. Nuñez bit, and tells Montoya that the target is a station chief.

These three elements intertwine in this fast-paced thriller, Berenson's 8th book; the action shifting between the States, Latin America, Middle East and Asia. As the US is drawn closer to a nuclear standoff with Iran, Wells is torn between his love for Anne and the chance of a "normal life", and the adrenaline rush of being a covert operative, on the trail of rogue CIA agent Glenn Mason.

On the way we are given insights into Mason's upbringing, unstable love life and the personal crisis which saw him leave Lima for Baghdad, then Hong Kong where he spirals out of control. The climax finds Wells, a true professional, fighting for his life against a foe that, in spite of taking on a new name and face, can't leave the past behind.

This book provides the prequel to "Twelve Days" and left me with mixed views. I enjoyed the third person narrative, the minor characters drifting in and out of the story, descriptions of Phuket (Thailand) and Istanbul (Turkey) and detailed fight sequences. But why would a man of John Wells' calibre take such risks without backup? In the final chapters the mysterious woman running Mason escapes and Duto has worked out who is back-rolling the operation. But I will certainly read more of this author, when I'm ready.
