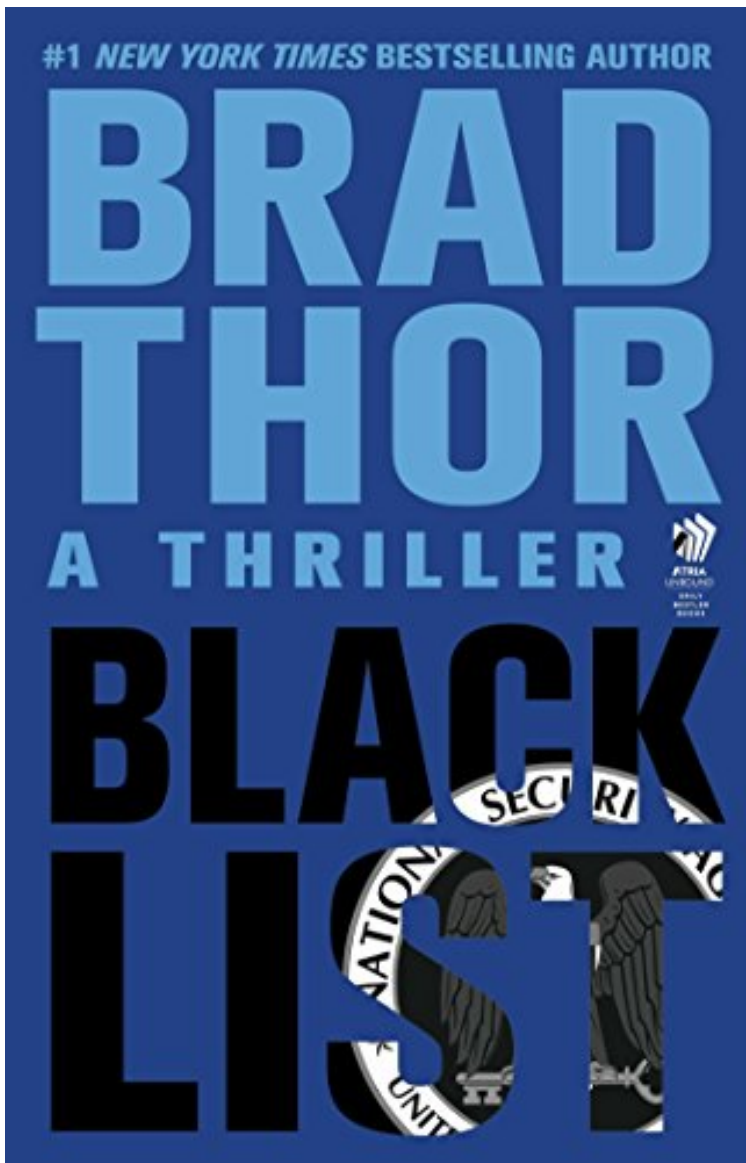


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Black List: A Thriller



Par Brad Thor
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA stunning thriller that predicted the National Security Agency scandal. "Brad Thor is as current as tomorrows headlines." Dan Brown#1 New York Times bestselling author Brad Thor returns with his most explosive thriller ever. Somewhere deep inside the United States government is a closely guarded list. Members of Congress never get to see itonly the President and a secret team of advisers. Once your name is on the list, it doesnt come off . . . until youre dead. Someone has just added counterterrorism operative Scot Harvaths name. Somehow Harvath must evade the teams dispatched to kill him long enough to untangle who has targeted him and why they want him out of the way. Somewhere, someone, somehow can put all the pieces together. The only question is, will Harvath get to that person before the United States

suffers the most withering terrorist attack ever conceived? An intense, page-turning novel that is action-packed and frighteningly real, *Black List* blurs the line between fiction and reality and once again reaffirms why Brad Thor "is arguably the best thriller writer of our time" (*Suspense Magazine*) and "America's favorite author" (*KTTX*).

Extrait *Black List* CHAPTER 1 RURAL VIRGINIA FRIDAY FORTY-EIGHT HOURS LATER Kurt Schroeder glanced down at his iPhone while his Nissan subcompact crunched across the estates pebbled motor court. No signal. It was the same with his navigation system. He didn't need to turn on his satellite radio, it wouldn't have a signal either. Everything had been blacked out about a mile before the gates just as it was supposed to be. None of the locals had ever made a connection between the signal loss and the fact that it only happened when the owners of the estate were in residence. Some blamed atmospheric conditions, while a few local conspiracy theorists pointed to the government, as neighbors laughed them off. Little did those neighbors know how close to the truth the conspiracy theorists were. A company called Adaptive Technology Solutions had developed the signal-blocking technology for the use of the U.S. military in Afghanistan and Iraq. ATS was one of the most successful American tech companies most people had never heard of. Practically an arm of, and indistinguishable from, the National Security Agency, ATS also conducted highly sensitive work for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Department, the State Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Homeland Security, the Treasury Department, the Department of Justice, and a host of other agencies, including the little-known United States Cyber Command the group in charge of centralizing U.S. cyberspace operations. Whether via software, hardware, personnel, or training, there wasn't a move the United States government made in relation to the Internet that didn't somehow involve ATS. So intertwined was it with America's political, military, and intelligence DNA, that it was hard to discern where Uncle Sam stopped and ATS began. Very little was known about the organization, which was exactly what ATS wanted. Had its board of directors ever been published, it would have read like a who's who of D.C. power. In addition to two former intelligence chiefs, it included a former Vice President, three retired federal judges, a former Attorney General, a former Secretary of State, a former Federal Reserve Chairman, two former Secretaries of the Treasury, three former Senators, and a former Secretary of Defense. Some believed that ATS was a front for the NSA, while others speculated that the CIA might have been involved in its creation. All, of course, pure speculation. Anyone who knew anything about ATS only really knew about that particular facet they were dealing with, and even then, they didn't know much. The highly secretive company had worked for decades concealing its true breadth and scope. What was visible above the waterline was only the tip of the iceberg. The organization was also exceedingly careful about whom they brought inside. Nowhere was the selection process as rigorous as at ATS. Its members shared a very particular worldview, along with a deeply held belief that not only could they shape domestic and international events, it was their duty to do so. Their goals were not the kinds of things they wanted discussed in newspapers and on the Internet. They took great pride in their anonymity. The corporation's retreat, with its sophisticated countersurveillance and anti-eavesdropping measures, sat on more than two hundred rural Virginia acres of rolling green countryside. It featured a clutch of buildings, the centerpiece of which was a large, redbrick neoclassical home fronted by thick white columns. The estate had been named Walworth after the ruins of a small, walled farm at the south end of the property predating the Revolutionary War. Its ownership was hidden behind blind land trusts and offshore corporations. No records existed at the county recorder's office, and no overhead imagery of the property could be accessed via satellite. For all intents and purposes, the estate didn't even exist, which was exactly what the powerful forces behind Adaptive Technology Solutions wanted. Kurt Schroeder had been to Walworth a handful of times, having helped to oversee the installation of several of its computer and security upgrades. But he'd never been to the property for a gathering of the firm's board of directors. He had only seen the full board together on one occasion, when he had been invited to accompany his boss to a winter board meeting at the ATS property on Grand Cayman. With its vast wealth, the company hierarchy never failed to do things first-class. The motor court of the Virginia estate looked like the parking lot of a luxury European car dealership, with multiple BMWs, Audis, Mercedes, and Range Rovers. Off to the side, the security teams had parked their armored, black Chevy Suburbans. Schroeder located an empty spot and parked. He looked into the mirror and dried the perspiration on his forehead. Tightening the knot in his tie, he took a deep breath. His boss, the man who ran ATS, was a lot like his deceased mother. Both had considerably volatile tempers. Schroeder climbed out of his unimpressive yet efficient Nissan and detected the scent of woodsmoke from one of the houses many chimneys as he walked across the motor court. Martin Vignon, the head of corporate security, met him at the

door. Like the rest of the team, Vignon wore a dark suit and had a Secret Servicestyle earpiece protruding from one ear. He was a tall man with impossibly pale skin and neatly combed white hair. Behind his back, the boss who seemed to have a demeaning nickname for everyone referred to Vignon as Powder. Whenever he threw the slur around, most of the employees uncomfortably laughed it off or pretended they hadn't heard it. Schroeder didn't know much about where Vignon had come from nor how he'd secured his job with the organization. Some said he was former military, others said he was former intelligence. Nevertheless, it was widely agreed that the man was discourteous and off-putting. Schroeder had looked into his background once, but the man was a black hole. Everything had been erased. The sick joke that had sprung up around his cold demeanor was that he was possessed of unusual powers; instead of seeing dead people, he created them. He was the only American on the security team; the rest were Israelis, all handpicked by the security chief himself. Vignon gave Schroeder a curt nod and waved him toward two of his men, one of whom was holding a metal detector wand. Considering all he was entrusted with at ATS, being wanded was an indignity. These wannabe Secret Service morons were out of control. Not wanting to cause a scene, Schroeder simply submitted to the search. Before the security team could fully sweep him, though, his boss appeared. Where have you been? the man demanded. It was a stupid question. He knew where he had been, and Schroeder didn't bother answering. You'd better not have bad news for me. Schroeder was opening his mouth to respond when his boss cut him off. Not here. He gestured for him to follow and led him down a wide hallway to an opulent study. A myriad of exotic animal heads adorned the walls. A fire in the fireplace ward off the chill from outside. Schroeder waited for his boss to offer him a seat, but the offer never came, so he just stood there. Well? the boss asked, as he walked over to a wet bar and poured himself a drink. Schroeder took a deep breath into his lungs and let it out. I'm sorry. Nothing yet. What do you mean, nothing yet? We haven't been able to locate anything. Don't give me that we bullshit, the older man turned and said. I made myself perfectly clear. I tasked you with this, and failure is not an option. Craig Middleton was in his early sixties, had a thin build and curly gray hair that resembled a scouring pad. Despite sporting a perpetual tan and laser-whitened teeth, the most distinct feature of his rather unremarkable appearance were his deep-set eyes, which were rimmed with dark circles. Contrary to Craig Middleton's opinion, he was not an attractive man. Schroeder eyed the matching purple silk tie and handkerchief that his peacock of a boss was sporting and, masking his distaste, focused carefully on his words. It's only a matter of time, he replied. Don't worry. Middleton eyed his subordinate as he took a long draught of scotch. Do you like your job, Kurt? Excuse me? I said do you like your job? Of course I do. The older man shook his head and motioned for him to be quiet. I could have taken anyone under my wing, but I took you. And I'm grateful for I don't think you are, Kurt. I think, like the rest of your spoiled, entitled generation, you take everything for granted. I don't think you know the meaning of hard work. What's worse, I don't think you know the meaning of loyalty. Do you have any idea what I put on the line to bring you in and raise you up through the ranks? Do you have any idea at all? Schroeder knew all too well. If it weren't for Craig Middleton, he'd be sitting in a federal prison, or worse. I think you know where my loyalty lies. The older man took another sip and then looked at his watch. Do I? I'm the one who has to go sit down with the board in ten minutes and look like I have zero control over this organization, and it's all because you aren't doing your job. We're talking about a needle in a haystack. We own the fucking haystack, Middleton spat. Every last fucking straw of it. We own every rock. We own every drainpipe. We own every hollowed-out fucking tree. You can't even change your fucking mind without us knowing about it. So don't tell me you've got nothing yet. You've got everything you could possibly need at your disposal. Which means you'd better get me something and get it to me soon. Do you understand me? Schroeder nodded. Don't you fucking nod at me, snapped Middleton. Answer me. Yes, sir, he piped up. I understand. His boss then raised his hand and pointed at the door. The pep talk was over. As Schroeder left the house and climbed back into his car, Middleton crossed over to the desk and picked up the handset of his encrypted telephone, known as an STE, short for Secure Terminal Equipment. Inserting a dummy NSA Crypto Card into the slot, he dialed. After two rings, the call was answered. What's the verdict? I think he's lying, Middleton stated. What do you want me to do? Follow him. And if he is lying? replied the voice. Add him to the list. *Revue de presse*"[Brad Thor] is arguably the best thriller writer of our time." -- *Suspense Magazine* Thor has mastered thriller storytelling with fast pacing and plots that are relevant to American readers." -- *The Miami Herald* "Anyone who thinks the only thing to fear is fear itself should meet Brad Thor." -- *Newsweek*