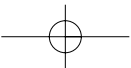
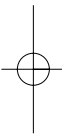
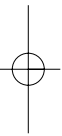


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***THE FIRST
COMMANDMENT***

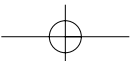
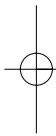
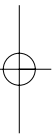
**The next thrilling novel
by Brad Thor**

**Turn the page for a preview
of *The First Commandment* . . .**



De inimico non loquaris sed cogites—

*Do not wish ill for your enemy . . .
plan it*



CHAPTER 1

U.S. NAVAL STATION GUANTÁNAMO BAY, CUBA

When hot and humid, Cuba hovered somewhere in between absolute misery and “the bath is ready, does anyone have any razor blades?” But when it was cold and raining, Cuba was downright unbearable. Tonight was one of those nights.

When the guards arrived at X-ray block they were in a bad mood—worse than usual. And it wasn’t because of the weather. Something was wrong. It was written all over their faces as they pulled five of the camp’s most dangerous prisoners from their isolation cells and ordered them at gunpoint to strip.

Philippe Roussard hadn’t been at Guantánamo the longest, but he had definitely been interrogated the hardest. A European of Arab descent, he was a sniper of extraordinary ability whose exploits were legendary. Videos of his kills played on continuous loops on jihadist Web sites across the Internet. To his Muslim brothers he was nothing short of a superhero in the radical Islamist pantheon. To the United States, he was a horrific killing machine responsible for the deaths of over one hundred U.S. soldiers.

As Roussard looked into the eyes of his jailers, he saw

more than the pure hatred they normally viewed him and his fellow captives with. Tonight it was coupled with absolute disgust. Whatever middle-of-the-night interrogation tactic the Task Force Guantánamo soldiers had in store for them, something told him it wasn't going to be like anything they had seen before. The guards appeared on the verge of losing control.

Had an attack been successfully executed against the United States? What else could have put the soldiers in such a state?

If so, Roussard felt certain that the Americans would make the prisoners pay. That was how life was at Guantánamo. The guards were petty and never missed an opportunity to lord their power over them. Undoubtedly, they had devised yet another humiliating exercise designed to insult their Muslim sensibilities. Privately, Roussard hoped it involved the attractive blond soldier who would disrobe down to her underwear and rub herself against him. Unlike the other prisoners, Philippe was not exactly a devout Muslim. His sensibilities were more along the lines of his captors and his fantasies of what he wanted to do to that woman more than kept him occupied through many of the long, lonely hours of isolation he withstood on a daily basis.

He was still speculating as to their fate when he heard the door at the far end of the cell block shut. Roussard looked up, hoping it was the blonde, but it wasn't. Another soldier had entered carrying five paper shopping bags. As he passed, he threw each of the prisoners a bag.

“Get dressed!” he ordered in halting Arabic.

Confused, all of the prisoners, including Philippe, re-

moved the civilian clothing from their bags and began to get dressed. Not accustomed to seeing anyone other than their guards, the prisoners looked at each other as they tried to figure out what was happening. Roussard was reminded of stories he'd been told of Jewish Concentration Camp prisoners who were told they were being taken for showers before being set free as they were led to the gas chambers.

He doubted the Americans were dressing them in new clothes only to take them off someplace to kill them, but nevertheless the uncertainty of what they were about to face filled him with more than a little trepidation.

"Why don't they try to make a run for it," one of the guards whispered to his comrade as he stroked the trigger guard of his M-16. "I just want one of these fuckers to rabbit on us."

"This isn't right," replied the other. "What the hell are we doing?"

"You two, shut up!" barked their commander, who then called in a series of commands over his radio.

Something definitely wasn't right.

Once they were completely clothed, shackles were placed around their wrists and ankles and they were lined up against the far wall.

This is it, thought Roussard as he held the stare of the soldier who was hoping for one of the prisoners to rabbit.

The soldier's finger went from his weapon's trigger guard to its actual trigger and he seemed about to say something, when a series of vehicles ground to a halt just outside.

“That’s us,” shouted the Task Force commander. “Let’s mount up.”

As the prisoners were shoved toward the door, Roussard couldn’t understand why they were being moved, much less why they had been dressed in civilian clothes. Maybe when they got outside and he could see where they were going things would make more sense.

That plan was dashed as one by one, hoods were placed over each man’s head before they were taken outside to a waiting column of tan Humvees.

Ten minutes later, the convoy came to a stop. Before Roussard’s heavy hood was removed, he could make out the distinct, high-pitched whine of idling jet engines.

Once on the rain-soaked tarmac, the prisoners stared up at the enormous Boeing 737 as their shackles were removed. A metal staircase had been rolled up against the side of the aircraft, and a door stood wide open.

None of the men knew what to think, but based on the demeanor of the soldiers, Roussard was quickly figuring it out. Without being directed to do so, he took a step forward. When none of the soldiers tried to stop him, he took another and another until his feet touched the first metal step and he began climbing upward two at a time. His salvation was at hand. Just as he had known it eventually would be.

With the sound of the other prisoners pounding up the gangway behind him, Roussard burst into the cabin. Five rows of seats had been completely removed and replaced with five surgical beds. Bolted to the floor next to each were large medical contraptions that looked like

dialysis machines, and next to those were coolers marked *Human Blood*.

Roussard raced past the medical personnel toward the back of the plane, searching each of the faces he saw for the one that would convince him this all wasn't just some dream born of prolonged and torturous isolation. That face never materialized.

Instead, Philippe Roussard felt a heavy hand on his shoulder. When he turned, the plane's first officer addressed him in Arabic. "We were told to give you this," he said as he handed Roussard a heavy black envelope.

Without even opening it, Roussard knew who it was from.

"If you wouldn't mind taking a seat," continued the first officer. "The captain is eager to be under way."

Roussard found an empty chair near the window and buckled himself in.

He then opened the envelope and read its contents. A slow smile began to spread across his face. Not only was he free, but it looked as if he would have his revenge—and much sooner than he would have thought.

Opening his window shade, Roussard could see the soldiers climbing back into their Humvees and driving away from the airstrip, several with hands out windows, their middle fingers raised in mock salute.

As the aircraft's engines roared to life and the heavy beast began to roll forward, cheers of "Allah Akbar," *God is great*, erupted from the front of the plane.

Allah was indeed great, but Roussard knew it wasn't Allah who had arranged for their release. As he caressed

the black envelope, he knew their gratitude belonged to someone much more powerful.

Turning his attention back to the window, and with the soldiers quickly disappearing from view outside, Roussard raised his thumb and forefinger in a pantomime pistol, took aim, and pulled his imaginary trigger.

Now that he was free, he knew it was only a matter of time before his handler turned him loose inside America to enact their revenge.