



The Last Man: A Novel (A Mitch Rapp Novel Book 11)

By Vince Flynn

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Joe Rickman, head of CIA clandestine operations in Afghanistan, has been kidnapped and his four bodyguards executed in cold blood. But Mitch Rapp's experience and nose for the truth make him wonder if something even more sinister isn't afoot. Irene Kennedy, director of the CIA, has dispatched him to Afghanistan to find Rickman at all costs.

Rapp, however, isn't the only one looking for Rickman. The FBI is too, and it quickly becomes apparent that they're less concerned with finding Rickman than placing the blame on Rapp.

With CIA operations in crisis, Rapp must be as ruthless and deceitful as his enemies if he has any hope of finding Rickman and completing his mission. But with elements within his own government working against both him and American interests, will Rapp be stopped dead before he can succeed?

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Editorial Review

Review

"Flynn is a master--maybe *the* master--of thrillers in which the pages seem to turn themselves." (*Book Reporter*)

"Flynn has never been better." (*Providence Journal*)

"*The Last Man* is arguably Flynn's best work yet. Tight, right and dynamite." (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*)

"Certainly, *The Last Man* is one of Flynn's most complex installments in the Rapp canon to date. And Flynn, master storyteller that he is, skillfully navigates the reader through the twists and turns of the tale to a conclusion that puts the main plot elements to rest while setting up the next intriguing volume." (*Bookreporter*)

"Flynn fans will not be disappointed. Absolutely first rate." (*Men Reading Books blog*)

About the Author

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Vince Flynn (1966–2013) created one of contemporary fiction's most popular heroes: CIA counterterrorist agent Mitch Rapp, featured in thirteen of Flynn's acclaimed political thrillers. All of his novels are *New York Times* bestsellers, including his stand-alone debut novel, *Term Limits*. The Mitch Rapp story begins with *American Assassin*, followed by *Kill Shot*, *Transfer of Power*, *The Third Option*, *Separation of Power*, *Executive Power*, *Memorial Day*, *Consent to Kill*, *Act of Treason*, *Protect and Defend*, *Extreme Measures*, *Pursuit of Honor*, *The Last Man*, and *The Survivor*.

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The Last Man

CHAPTER 1

JALALABAD, AFGHANISTAN

THE four dead men were lined up on the living room floor of the safe house. Mitch Rapp started with the one on the left. The bearded face, the dark, lifeless eyes, and the dime-sized bullet hole that marked the center of the man's forehead were all expected. One bullet, nice and neat—the way Rapp would have done it. The next two bodyguards looked the same, including red pucker marks in the center of their brows. The fourth Afghani was a different story. He'd been shot through the back of the head. A quarter of his face was now a jagged crater of flesh, blood, and bone. The exit wound told him the man had been shot by something a lot bigger than a 9mm—probably a .45 caliber with ammunition that pancaked and tumbled for maximum damage. There was nothing about this mess to give Rapp any assurance that things would be fine, but this last little twist cracked open the door on something he did not want to consider.

Rapp set the troubling thought aside for a second, tried to imagine how it had gone down. The early signs pointed toward a well-coordinated assault. The perimeter security had been breached; phone line, cameras, motion sensors, heat sensors, and even the pressure pads had all been taken off-line. The backup connection through the satellite dish on the roof had also been disabled. Whoever had attacked the safe house had the

knowledge and skill to hit the place without setting off a single alarm and alerting the quick-reaction force less than a mile away at the air base. According to the experts at Langley this was never supposed to happen. Four years earlier they had claimed the safe house was impregnable against any threat that the Taliban or any other local group could come up with. Rapp had told those same experts that they were full of shit. He'd never seen an impregnable safe house for the simple reason that people had to come and go.

As with most CIA safe houses, this one was intentionally bland. There was no American flag flown out front and there were no snappy Marines standing post at the main gate. This was a black site where the more unpleasant aspects of the war had been coordinated. Langley didn't want any official records of the comings and goings of the drug dealers, warlords, arms dealers, local politicians, police, and Afghan Army officers who were on the take.

The house looked like your run-of-the-mill two-story blockhouse in Jalalabad. There were quite a few upgrades that made it unique, but from the outside it looked dingy and run-down just like all the other houses in the neighborhood. The cinderblock wall that surrounded the property was coated with a special resin designed to prevent it from exploding into a million pieces and shredding the house in the event of a car bomb. The simple-looking front door contained a one-inch steel plate and a reinforced steel frame. All of the windows were bulletproof Plexiglas and the high-tech security cameras and sensors were concealed so as to not attract the attention of the neighbors. Langley had even taken the unusual precaution of buying the houses on each side and moving in the bodyguards and their families. All to protect one man.

Joe Rickman was the most cunning and brilliant operative Rapp had ever worked with. They'd known each other for sixteen years. At first Rapp didn't know what to think of him. Rickman was pure vanilla. There wasn't a single physical characteristic about him that was memorable. At five-feet-ten he was neither tall nor short. His mousy brown hair matched his dull brown eyes, and his weak chin completed the bland lines of his roundish face. On the rare occasion that you heard him speak, he was never animated and his voice was pure monotone—the kind of thing that could put the most restless baby to sleep.

Rickman's forgettable face allowed him to blend in and those who met him were almost underwhelmed by his presence. For Rickman that was just fine. Much of his success was built on fools underestimating him. He'd worked for the CIA for twenty-three years and it was rumored that he had never set foot inside headquarters. Only a few months earlier Rapp had asked him if the rumor was true. Rickman responded with a soft smile and said that he'd never been invited.

At the time, Rapp took the comment as a self-deprecating attempt at a little levity. Later he realized Rickman was dead serious. Rickman was one of those people who were tolerated only during tough times—usually war. For the last eight years he'd run America's clandestine war in Afghanistan. More than a billion dollars in cash had passed through his hands. Most of it was used to bribe people into playing on the right team, but a fair amount of the money was used to kill enemies and for a laundry list of other unpleasant things that went with the territory. People back at Langley didn't want to know what Rickman was up to. They only wanted results, and that was something Rickman was exceedingly good at. Underneath Rickman's bland façade was a cunning mind that was perfectly suited to the duplicitous, infinitely complicated world of espionage.

Rapp understood the tinge of fear in his boss's voice when she'd called him a little over two hours ago. When the morning guards showed up, they had discovered the bodies and the absence of Joe Rickman and had immediately alerted John Hubbard, the CIA's Jalalabad base chief. Hubbard rang his boss in Kabul and the shit rolled uphill from there. Rapp received a call from CIA Director Irene Kennedy while he was sitting down for breakfast in the big mess hall at Bagram Air Force Base. He had just arrived in-country the previous evening on a high-priority mission that was now on hold. Kennedy passed along what little information she knew and ordered Rapp to grab the next Blackhawk to Jalalabad. Rapp didn't argue. He and four of his team members made the trip and were on the ground in Jalalabad before nine in the morning.

Hubbard met them with a three-SUV convoy and a security detail and they rolled to the house.

Langley would want Rickman back, but Rapp got the strange feeling that all things considered, they would prefer the black-ops boss delivered in a body bag. It would be impossible to keep the kidnapping a secret. Rickman's operational knowledge and reach was too vast to ignore. Entire teams would already be gathered at Langley, working around the clock to assess the damage. If Rapp didn't find Rickman quickly, then complex, expensive operations would have to be unwound or assets would start showing up in morgues all across the Middle East, Southwest Asia, and beyond. Sooner or later Congress would get wind of the disaster and they would want answers. For a good number of people back at Langley, the only thing worse than Rickman spilling the Company secrets to an enemy would be Rickman testifying before Congress.

Rapp had a long and somewhat complicated history with Rickman. He respected the man, but it had taken a while. Rapp was considering how he would handle a possible order to eliminate Rickman when the towering Hubbard approached.

"This shit is really bad."

Rapp nodded. "It's about as bad as it could get."

Hubbard rubbed his bald head and asked, "How in the hell are we going to find him?"

"At this point I'm not sure." Rapp knew their chances for success were remote, but they had to start somewhere. "This is going to get really nasty, and if you don't have the stomach for it, Hub, I suggest you go back to the base and lock yourself in your office."

Hubbard studied Rapp for a moment and then nodded. "You don't have to worry about me getting all sensitive on you. I've been over here for two years. I've seen all kinds of crazy shit."

Most of that "crazy shit" was stuff done by the enemy. This time they would be the ones crossing the line. "I know you have," Rapp said, "but trust me, if we're going to get him back we are going to have to be more ruthless than you can imagine, and if at any point you start to have doubts, that's fine, step aside, but I need you to promise me you'll stick your head in the sand and keep your mouth shut."

Hubbard gave him a nervous smile. "I can do a Sergeant Schultz when I need to."

"Good," Rapp replied, even though he had his doubts.

"So where do you want to start?"

Rapp returned his attention to the row of dead men. "The bodyguards."

Hubbard turned his six-foot-five-inch frame toward the row of men and pursed his lips. "I think we can rule these four out."

Rapp focused on the man with the cratered face. An inside job was the obvious conclusion, but the bodyguards were all hardened Northern Alliance types. It was possible that one of them could have been bribed into giving up the crucial information on the security system, but unlikely. If one of them had turned, however, it was also possible that the Taliban, or whoever was responsible for this, had decided to kill the inside man as soon as they got what they wanted. The wrench in the works was that Rapp was pretty certain the Taliban had nothing to do with this. He pointed at the man missing part of his face. "Focus on this one. I want to know everything there is to know about him . . . especially his family. Do his parents or wife or kids have medical problems? Does he have a drug problem? Anything you can find."

“And the other eight?”

A team of interrogation experts from D.C. were in flight but not expected to land for another thirteen hours. “If you have the manpower, you can get started with them, but I doubt they’d hang around after something like this. What would you do if someone gave you a pile of cash to betray your buddies and a man like Rick?” Rickman’s first name was Joe, but everyone who worked with him called him Rick.

“I’d run.”

“That’s right.” Rapp pointed to the man who’d been shot with a .45 caliber. “Focus on this one for now.”

“So you think the Taliban turned him?”

Rapp ignored the question for the moment and asked, “Who moved these bodies?”

“What do you mean?”

“The bodies,” Rapp said as he pointed at the row of four. “They weren’t shot here. Look at the blood on the floor. They were dragged here after they were killed.” Rapp pointed at the stairs. “One of them was dragged down from the second story.”

Hubbard shrugged. “They were lined up like this when I got here.”

“Did the bodyguards move them?”

“Not that I know of. Do you want me to find out?”

“In a minute.” Rapp looked toward the front door where one of the bodyguards was standing post with an AK-47 gripped in both hands. “The neighbors . . . did they hear or see anything last night?”

“No. Not a thing.”

“No signs of forced entry?”

“Not that we’ve discovered, but they wouldn’t need to force their way in if one of these guys were helping them.”

“So no forced entry . . . four bodyguards . . . four headshots . . . four dead men. Anything about that seem unusual to you?”

Hubbard thought about it for a moment and said, “Not sure what you’re driving at.”

Rapp pointed at the bodies one after another, saying, “Nine-millimeter, nine-millimeter, nine-millimeter, .45 caliber, and my bet is they were all fired from suppressed weapons. Pretty accurate work. Good fire discipline. Look at the walls.”

Hubbard did a 360-degree turn and said, “What about them?”

“You see anything?”

“No.”

“That’s the point. You ever seen the Taliban operate like this? Four shots, four hits, and not a shot more. The Taliban likes to get the lead out. You know their MO. They would have rolled up on this place with three or four trucks and started unloading RPG rounds at all three buildings. This place would be riddled with bullets. This was done by pros.”

Hubbard made a sour face and then nodded. “Yeah . . . you’re right. The towelheads like to blow shit up. This is more like something our guys would do . . .”

Hubbard kept talking, but Rapp had stopped listening. The idea that U.S. Special Operators had been involved was something he hadn’t considered and something he didn’t want to consider. From the moment Rapp had heard Rickman was missing, there was a gnawing fear that he was about to head down the rabbit hole. Rickman excelled at his job for the simple reason that he could think five, ten, fifteen, even twenty steps ahead of the enemy, and everyone else, for that matter. There had been many times when Rapp didn’t understand what the man was up to because he wasn’t smart enough to follow Rick’s thinking.

“How about those assholes from the ISI?” Hubbard asked.

Rapp had considered the less-than-loyal members of the Pakistani Intelligence Service. They would be on the list as well as others. “Don’t forget the Iranians, the Russians, and the Chinese.” And there was one other possibility that Rapp wasn’t quite prepared to mention.

“My money’s on the ISI. This is just the kind of bullshit they’d pull.”

A thought occurred to Rapp. “Where’s the dog? That big frickin’ Rottweiler that never left Rick’s side?”

“Ajax . . . he died a month ago.”

Rapp was surprised by the news. “What was wrong with him?”

“Don’t know. Rick was pretty bummed out, though. Dog got sick, he took him to the vet and had to put him down. I think Rick said it was cancer or something like that.”

One of Rapp’s team members came down the stairs with a disturbed look on his face. The man had blond hair and blue eyes and was pushing fifty. “Not good,” was all he had to say.

Rapp looked at Scott Coleman and said, “Please tell me you’re talking about something other than the safe. Tell me the safe is untouched and all the cash, drives, and laptop are safely tucked inside.”

Coleman shook his head. “All gone. Completely cleaned out.”

Even though Rapp had expected it, he had held out some hope that he could give his boss a piece of good news. “Shit, I need to call Irene and let her know.” Rapp reached for his phone, but stopped upon hearing a commotion at the front door.

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