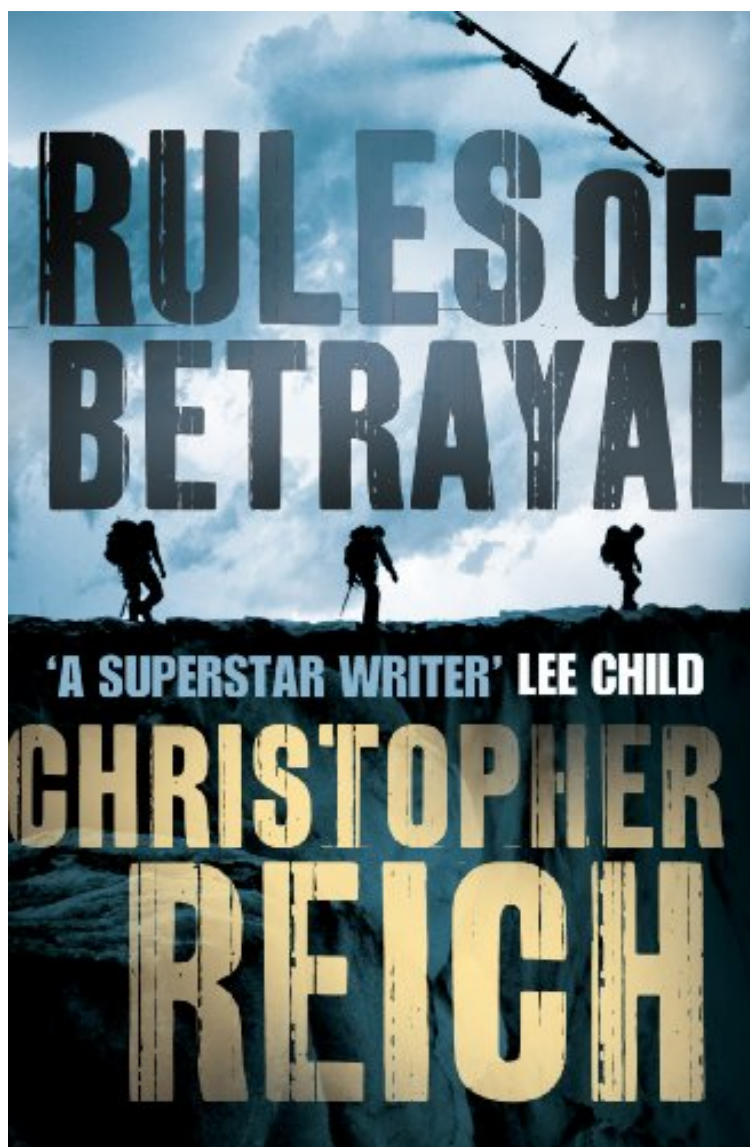


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Rules of Betrayal



Par Christopher Reich
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe most riveting novel yet in Christopher Reich's New York Times bestselling series- featuring Dr. Jonathan Ransom and his undercover-agent wife Emma, a dangerous woman with a mysterious past who has gone rogue in the high-stakes, serpentine world of international spies. In 1980, a secret American B-52 crashes high in a remote mountain range on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Nearly thirty years later, and spanning locales from those peaks to New York City, a terrible truth will be revealed. Jonathan Ransom returns as the resourceful doctor thrown into a shadowy world of double and triple agents where absolutely no one can be trusted. To stay alive, Ransom must unravel the mystery surrounding his wife-an enigmatic and lethal spy who plays by her own rules-and discover where her loyalties truly lie.

Rules of Betrayal is a masterfully plotted novel that cements Christopher Reich's reputation as one of the most admired espionage thriller writers today.

Extrait1Zabul Province, AfghanistanPresent dayThey formed on the plain at dawn.Man and beast and machine spread across the hard brown dirt in a line one hundred meters across. There were horses and jeeps and pickup trucks with heavy machine guns mounted on the flatbeds. They numbered only fifty men, and the villagers counted one hundred times that, but they were committed men. Warriors united under the banner of heaven. Sons of Tamerlane.The commander stood in the rear of his Hilux pickup, binoculars to his eyes, surveying his target. He was tall and formidable, and he wore his black wool turban piled high on his head, the trailing folds wrapped tightly around his face to guard against the bitter cold. His name was Sultan Haq. He was thirty years old. He had been imprisoned for six years, twenty-three hours a day, in a small, clean cage in a hot place far, far away. In deference to his name, and to his habit of growing his fingernails long and keeping them as sharp as a bird of prey's talons, his jailers had called him "the Hawk."The Hawk studied the cluster of low-slung mud buildings situated among the foothills two kilometers away. Through the mist, he could make out the town bazaar. Already shopkeepers were at work setting out their wares. Vendors cooked meat over brazier fires. Children and dogs ran up and down alleyways.He lowered his binoculars and looked at his men. Arrayed on either side of him were six vehicles identical to his own, battered Toyota four-by-fours with mounted .30 caliber machine guns. His men crouched at the base of the armament, Kalashnikovs clutched and ready, spare clips tucked into the leather bandoliers strung across their chests. Several among them carried old Soviet-era RPGs. In between the trucks, twenty or more horses moved anxiously, steam issuing from their nostrils, hooves pawing the ground. Their riders held their mounts at bay, waiting for the signal.The men wore no common uniform. Their clothes were ragged and dirty. But they were an army all the same. They had trained and drilled together. They had fought and been blooded. They were without mercy.Sultan Haq raised a hand into the air. As one, the gunners cocked the machine guns. The sound of metal striking metal reverberated across the barren landscape. The horses whinnied madly. He closed his fist, andhis men rose to their feet and let out a fierce cry. Throwing back his head, Haq joined them, feeling the spirit of his ancestors rise within him. Closing his eyes, he envisioned the rampaging horde. He saw thundering hooves and flashing swords and smelled acrid smoke filling the air. He heard the screams of the vanquished and tasted death on his tongue.He opened his eyes and returned to the present. Once more he was at home on the flat lands of eastern Afghanistan. He pounded his fist on the roof of the cab, and the pickup roared to life and accelerated across the fallow fields. In a few short months, these same fields would come to life as the poppy awoke, grew, and bloomed. Last year these fields had yielded three thousand kilos of raw opium, earning its farmers millions of U.S. dollars-more than enough to purchase stores and weapons to equip a thousand of his men.The village must be brought under the Taliban's white flag. It was a question of economics, not religion.A bullet cut the air above Haq's head, and a split second later the crack of the gunshot reached his ear. Dispassionately, he watched as the villagers armed themselves and formed a hasty skirmish line. Still he held back from giving the order to fire.Seconds passed, and the air was alive with gunfire, lead whizzing past like a swarm of angry bees. A shot splintered the windshield of the pickup next to him. He glimpsed a spray of blood, and the vehicle peeled off."Commence firing," he said into his two-way radio.The first mortar landed in the center of the village bazaar. A geyser of dirt shot into the air. A second mortar exploded, followed by a third. Confused, and unsure of where to direct their fire, the skirmish line broke.The Hawk looked on with satisfaction. He had positioned two squads on the higher ground south of the village to deliver fire from the rear while he attacked from the front. It was a classic hammer-and-anvil maneuver as taught by the United States Army Handbook of Infantry Tactics. Remarkably, he had found the handbook in the prison library. He had committed every page and illustration to memory.The truck climbed a rise and the village came into full view. It was a scene of chaos, with men, women, and children scrambling in every direction, seeking cover where none was to be had. Turning, he tapped the gunner on the shoulder. The machine gun roared to life, spraying the square in disciplined bursts as gunners from the other pickups opened fire. Bodies dropped to the ground. Entire walls of shops and offices disintegrated and collapsed. A house caught fire.In his free hand, Sultan Haq clutched a Remington long-barrel sniper rifle pried from the fingers of the enemy. It was a fine and accurate weapon with a polished maple stock and the words "Barnes" and"USMC" carved into the butt. It fired only a single round, but a single round was enough. As a boy, he'd hunted bighorn sheep in the rugged mountains of Kunar Province in the north. He knew how to shoot.He signaled for his truck to slow and, raising the rifle to his eye, found a target, a young man running up the hillside clutching a woman's hand. He closed his finger around the trigger. The rifle kicked pleasantly. The

young man fell to the ground. Pleased, Haq shouted for the driver to accelerate. The truck mounted a final hillock and barreled into the village. An elderly mullah ran in front of the truck, waving his arms furiously. "Stop!" he shouted. Haq halted alongside the man and jumped to the ground. "This village is now under my control," he said. "You will follow the dictates of Abdul Haq and the Haq clan." The elder nodded abjectly, tears rolling down his wrinkled cheeks. "I surrender." Haq raised an arm. "Cease fire!" He waited as his soldiers shepherded the townsfolk toward a water fountain at the center of the bazaar. When they arrived, he ordered the elder to his knees. The old man complied. Haq put the barrel of his rifle to his head and shot him. Stepping away from the body, he removed a list of names from his pocket. "Where is Abdullah Masri?" he called. There was no answer. He aimed his rifle at a weak man with an insufficient growth of facial hair and shot him dead. Then he repeated the question. A stout man emerged from a store that had been selling DVDs of Western movies and Japanese television sets. "You are Masri?" asked Haq. The man nodded. Haq took his time slipping a bullet into the rifle, then shot the man in the head. "Where is Muhammad Fawzi?" One by one, Sultan Haq called out the names of the village's leaders. He executed the schoolteacher and the grocer. He executed a homosexual and a woman suspected of adultery. For months he had been spying on the town, readying for this moment. There was one last thing to do. Climbing into the cab of his pickup, he pointed to a large whitewashed building that housed the village school. Like most of the buildings in the region, it was built with stone and mud. The driver positioned the truck's tail at the front of the school. A second truck came alongside. Moving backward, then forward, then backward again, the trucks battered the wall until it collapsed. Then they moved to the next wall and did the same, until the school was no more. Afterward, his men walked among the rubble, gathering books, maps, and any learning materials they could find and dumping them into a pile. When they finished, he hauled a jerrican from his truck and doused the pile with gasoline. As he was about to light it, a boy ran forward. "Stop," he pleaded. "We have nowhere else to learn." Haq eyed the brave child. He was interested not in the boy's words but in the fiberglass cast on his left arm. To the best of Haq's knowledge, there was only a rudimentary clinic in the village. In his country, broken limbs were set in plaster, not fiberglass. He had seen this advanced medical treatment only once before. "Where did you get this?" he asked, touching the cast. "The healer," said the boy. Haq's ears perked up. He hadn't heard about a healer in these parts. "Who is this healer?" The boy looked away. Haq grabbed the child's jaw in his immense hand, the sharpened nails raising welts on his cheek. "Who?" "A crusader," someone shouted. Haq spun. "A crusader? Here? Alone?" "He's traveling with an assistant. A Hazara who carries medicine for him in a bag." "Is the healer American?" asked Haq. "A Westerner," came an answer. "He speaks English and some Pashto. We didn't ask if he was American. He cured many people. He fixed the khan's stomach and repaired my cousin's knee." Haq released the boy, shoving him backward. His heart was racing, but he hid his anticipation beneath a veil of anger. "Where did he go?" An elder pointed toward the mountains. "There." Haq looked at the foothills that rose and eventually formed the massive mountain range known as the Hindu Kush. Tossing the lighter onto the pile of books, he walked back to his truck, paying scant attention as the flames climbed into the sky. "Go," he said to the driver. "To the mountains."

Jonathan Ransom woke and knew that something was wrong. Bolting upright, he pulled his sleeping bag to his waist and listened. Across the room, Hamid, his assistant, slept on the ground, snoring. Beyond the shuttered windows, a camel brayed. Outside, a pushcart rolled past, its arthritic axles in need of oil, followed by a trio of voices raised in conversation. The cart, he had learned during his week in the village of Khos-al-Fari, belonged to the butcher, who was presently transporting his daily supply of freshly slaughtered goats to the town bazaar to be displayed hanging from tenterhooks in the front of his stall. The cart continued down the hill. The voices died away. All was silent but for the ghostly roar of the Gar River churning through the nearby gorge. Jonathan remained stock-still, the frigid air stinging his cheeks. It was only mid-November, yet in the steep, inhospitable foothills of eastern Afghanistan, winter had arrived with a vengeance. A minute passed. Still he heard nothing. And then the crack of a rifle. A single shot-high-caliber, judging by its report. He waited, expecting more gunfire, but none came, and he wondered if a hunter had taken one of the big-horned Marco Polo sheep that roamed the mountainside. It was almost five a.m. Time to begin the day. With a grunt, he unzipped the sleeping bag to his feet and stood on the dirt floor. Shivering, he lit the kerosene lamp, then hurried to pull on a second pair of woolen socks and a beat-up pair of flannel-lined cargo pants. A camp table in one corner held a washbasin, a jug of water, a cup with his toothbrush and toothpaste, and a washcloth. Jonathan poured water into the basin. The water had partially frozen overnight, and islands of ice floated on the surface. He washed his hands and face, then ran the washcloth over his body, scrubbing vigorously to stop his teeth from chattering. Finished, he dried himself, brushed his teeth,

and put on his shirt and jacket. His hair was too long and tangled to tame with a brush, so he combed it with his fingers for a few moments before giving up on it. "Hamid," he said. "Wake up." To combat the cold, Hamid had disappeared inside his sleeping bag. Jonathan crossed the room and kicked him. "Move it." A head of unruly black hair popped out of the sleeping bag. Hamid peered angrily around the room. In the dim light, the circles under his eyes gained depth and he looked older than his nineteen years. "That hurt." "Get your butt out of the sack. We've got a lot to do today." "Just a sec-" "Now." Hamid sat up slowly, pulling his cell phone out of the bag and checking it for messages. Jonathan observed him, wondering for the hundredth time how a village could not have electricity but manage to have cellular phone service. "Your mom call?" Hamid didn't look up from the phone. "Not funny." "Yeah, well, put that thing away and get moving.

I'll see you at the clinic." Jonathan picked up the duffel that held his equipment and swung it over his shoulder. Pulling on his pakol hat, he opened the door and sniffed the air. Wood smoke, damp foliage, and peat: the smells of the world away from civilization. It was a scent he knew well. For eight years he had traveled the world as a physician with Doctors Without Borders. He had worked from the top of Africa to the bottom. He had spent time in Kosovo, Beirut, and Iraq, too. Wherever he was located, his mission was to bring medical care to those who needed it most. Politics was not a factor. There were no good guys or bad guys. There were only patients. He'd arrived in Afghanistan two months before, but he no longer worked for Doctors Without Borders. Events in the recent past prevented him from working in an official capacity as a physician or surgeon for them or anyone else. The man at the American embassy had told him he was crazy to venture into the Red Zone—the Red Zone being anywhere outside Kabul. When Jonathan said he was traveling alone, without bodyguards or weapons or any personal security whatsoever, so that he might offer medical care to people in the remotest villages, the man called him "suicidal." Jonathan didn't think so. He had calculated the risks, weighed them against his responsibilities, and found the balance equal, more or less. Now, standing outside his one-room shelter in the predawn darkness, his boots sinking into the icy muck, he listened again. It wasn't noise that unsettled him, but the lack of it. "One hour," he said to Hamid, then shut the door. A soft rain fell as he walked along the path zigzagging down the hillside. Below, shrouded in clouds on a spit of flat terrain tucked between steeply descending mountains, lay the village. All the structures looked the same: low-slung, rectangular slurries of rock, timber, and mud that seemed to have grown out of the earth itself. A thousand people lived in Khos-al-Fari. Many times that number visited from the surrounding valley to trade at the bazaar, sell crops and timber, and conduct a rudimentary social life. From the Hardcover edition. **Revue de presse PRAISE FOR RULES OF BETRAYAL** "When I want a fantastic read, I reach for a Christopher Reich thriller. Loaded with heart-pounding action, page-turning suspense, and unforgettable characters, Rules of Betrayal is one of the best books of the year. Christopher Reich is the king of international intrigue and Rules of Betrayal is Reich on the money!" Brad Thor, #1 New York Times bestselling author of Foreign Influence **PRAISE FOR CHRISTOPHER REICH FROM SOME OF HIS FAMOUS FANS** "Christopher Reich is at the top of his game." David Baldacci "Christopher Reich is one of my favorite suspense writers." James Patterson "Christopher Reich is the master of the espionage thriller for the 21st century." Clive Cussler "Reich concocts an elaborate, appealingly twisty plot." Entertainment Weekly "This series is taking off like a rocket." Lee Child From the Hardcover edition.