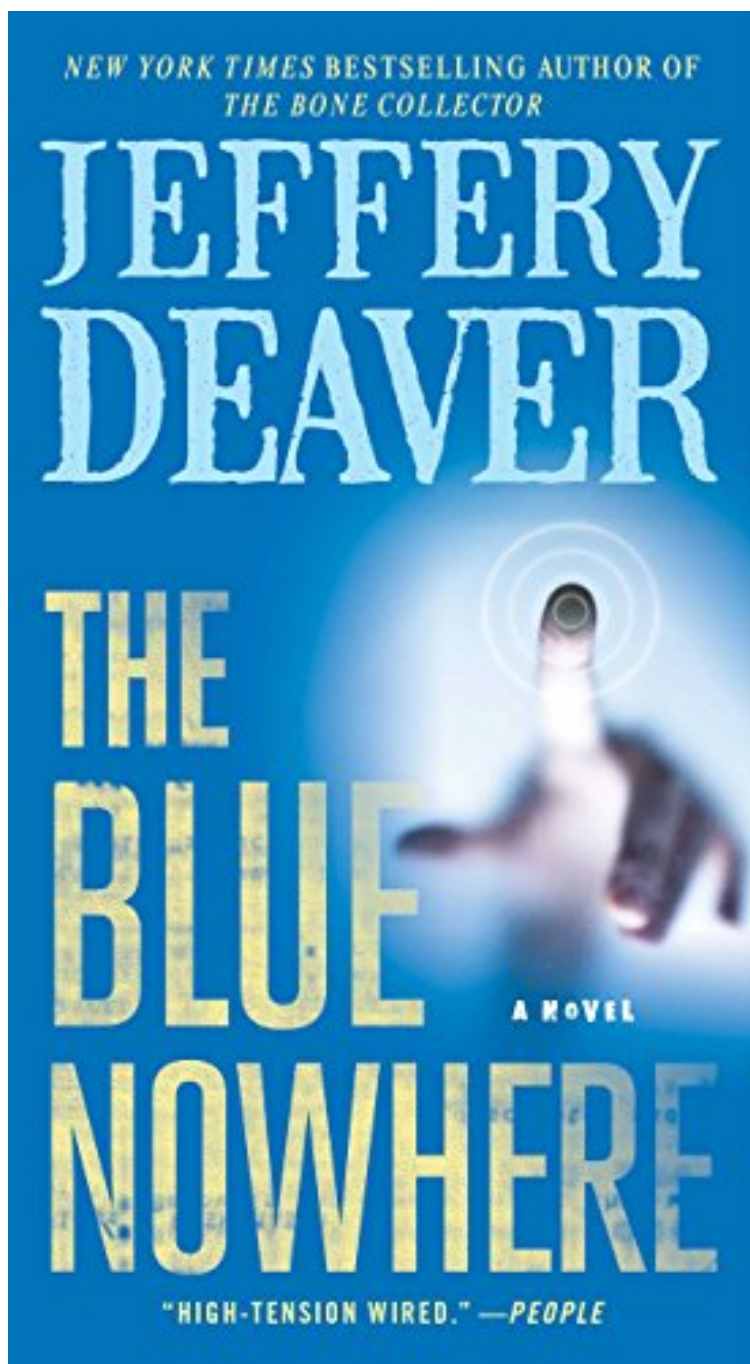


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# The Blue Nowhere: A Novel (English Edition)



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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurJeffery Deaver, New York Times bestselling author of The Skin Collector and The Bone Collector featuring popular forensic detective Lincoln Rhyme, delivers a masterful thriller about a psychotic computer hacker/killer packed with stunning and fact-based technical details and signature Deaver

plot twists. People in Silicon Valley are dying. A mysterious, psychotic, and brilliant computer hacker, code-named Phate, is infiltrating their computer, invading their lives, and with the perfect line, the perfect, personal detail luring them to their deaths. Desperate, the head of the Computer Crimes Division frees Wyatt Gillette, imprisoned on his own hacking charge, to aid the investigation. Gillette has wrangled with Phate before and is glad to have his chance for revenge. But when the head of the CCD, and the man who hired him, is murdered, Wyatt must report to Frank Bristol, a grizzled homicide detective who favors old-fashioned sleuthing and forensic evidence to track killers. Together, Wyatt and Bristol make an unlikely team but with the same villain in their crosshairs, they'll have to learn to get over the generational, and technological, gaps. Filled with accurate technical details, a high-tension wired (People) mystery, and shocking surprises, *The Blue Nowhere* will keep you guessing the outcome to the very last page.

In this 21st century version of the "Gunfight at the O.K. Corral," two computer wizards engage in the kind of high-tech combat that only a hacker could love. Wyatt Gillette, a cybergenius who's never used his phenomenal talent for evil, is sitting in a California jail doing time for a few harmless computer capers when he gets a temporary reprieve--a chance to help the Computer Crimes Unit of the state police nail a cracker (a criminally inclined hacker) called Phate who's using his ingenious program, Trapdoor, to lure innocent victims to their death by infiltrating their computers. Gillette and Phate were once the kings of cyberspace--the Blue Nowhere of the title--but Phate has gone way past the mischievous electronic pranks they once pulled and crossed over to the dark side. While Trapdoor can hack its way into any computer, it's Phate's skill at "social engineering" as well as his remarkable coding ability that makes him such a menace to society. As Wyatt explains to the policeman who springs him from prison so that he can find and stop Phate before he kills again, "It means conning somebody, pretending you're someone you're not. Hackers do it to get access to data bases and phone lines and pass codes. The more facts about somebody you can feed back to them, the more they believe you and the more they'll do what you want them to." Bestselling author Jeffery Deaver (*The Empty Chair*, *The Devil's Teardrop*) ratchets up the suspense one line of code at a time; his terrific pacing drives the narrative to a thrilling and explosive conclusion. This thriller is bound to induce paranoia in anyone who still believes he can hide his deepest secrets from anyone with the means, motive, and modem to ferret them out.

--Jane Adams

### Chapter One

The battered white van had made her uneasy. Lara Gibson sat at the bar of Vesta's Grill on De Anza in Cupertino, California, gripping the cold stem of her martini glass and ignoring the two young chip-jocks standing nearby, casting flirtatious glances at her. She looked outside again, into the overcast drizzle, and saw no sign of the windowless Econoline that, she believed, had followed her from her house, a few miles away, to the restaurant. Lara slid off the bar stool and walked to the window, glanced outside. The van wasn't in the restaurant's parking lot. Nor was it across the street in the Apple Computer lot or the one next to it, belonging to Sun Microsystems. Either of those lots would've been a logical place to park to keep an eye on her -- if the driver had in fact been stalking her. No, the van was just a coincidence, she decided -- a coincidence aggravated by a splinter of paranoia. She returned to the bar and glanced at the two young men who were alternately ignoring her and offering subtle smiles. Like nearly all the young men here for happy hour they were in casual slacks and tie-less dress shirts and wore the ubiquitous insignia of Silicon Valley -- corporate identification badges on thin canvas lanyards around their necks. These two sported the blue cards of Sun Microsystems. Other squadrons represented here were Compaq, Hewlett-Packard and Apple, not to mention a slew of new kids on the block, start-up Internet companies, which were held in some disdain by the venerable Valley regulars. At thirty-two, Lara Gibson was probably five years older than her two admirers. And as a self-employed businesswoman who wasn't a geek -- connected with a computer company -- she was easily five times poorer. But that didn't matter to these two men, who were already captivated by her exotic, intense face surrounded by a tangle of raven hair, her ankle boots, a red-and-orange gypsy skirt and a black sleeveless top that showed off hard-earned biceps. She figured that it would be two minutes before one of these boys approached her and she missed that estimate by only ten seconds. The young man gave her a variation of a line she'd heard a dozen times before: Excuse me don't mean to interrupt but hey would you like me to break your boyfriend's leg for making a beautiful woman wait alone in a bar and by the way can I buy you a drink while you decide which leg? Another woman might have gotten mad, another woman might have stammered and blushed and looked uneasy or might have flirted back and let him buy her an unwanted drink because she didn't have the wherewithal to handle the situation. But those would be women weaker than she. Lara Gibson was "the queen of urban protection," as the San Francisco Chronicle had once dubbed her. She fixed her eyes on the man's, gave a formal smile and said, "I don't care for any company right now." Simple as that. End of

conversation. He blinked at her frankness, avoided her staunch eyes and returned to his friend. Power... it was all about power. She sipped her drink. In fact, that damn white van had brought to mind all the rules she'd developed as someone who taught women to protect themselves in today's society. Several times on the way to the restaurant she'd glanced into her rearview mirror and noticed the van thirty or forty feet behind. It had been driven by some kid. He was white but his hair was knotted into messy brown dreadlocks. He wore combat fatigues and, despite the overcast and misty rain, sunglasses. This was, of course, Silicon Valley, home of slackers and hackers, and it wasn't unusual to stop in Starbucks for a venti skim latte and be waited on by a polite teenager with a dozen body piercings, a shaved head and an outfit like an inner-city gangsta's. Still, the driver had seemed to stare at her with an eerie hostility. Lara found herself absently fondling the can of pepper spray she kept in her purse. Another glance out the window. She saw only fancy cars bought with dot-com money. A look around the room. Only harmless geeks. Relax, she told herself and sipped her potent martini. She noted the wall clock. Quarter after seven. Sandy was fifteen minutes late. Not like her. Lara pulled out her cell phone but the display read no service. She was about to find the pay phone when she glanced up and saw a young man enter the bar and wave at her. She knew him from somewhere but couldn't quite place him. His trim but long blond hair and the goatee had stuck in her mind. He wore white jeans and a rumpled blue work shirt. His concession to the fact he was part of corporate America was a tie; as befit a Silicon Valley businessman, though, the design wasn't stripes or Jerry Garcia flowers but a cartoon Tweety Bird. "Hey, Lara." He walked up and shook her hand, leaned against the bar. "Remember me? I'm Will Randolph. Sandy's cousin? Cheryl and I met you on Nantucket -- at Fred and Mary's wedding." Right, that's where she recognized him from. He and his pregnant wife sat at the same table with Lara and her boyfriend, Hank. "Sure. How you doing?" "Good. Busy. But who isn't around here?" His plastic neckwear read Xerox Corporation PARC. She was impressed. Even nongeeks knew about Xerox's legendary Palo Alto Research Center five or six miles north of here. Will flagged down the bartender and ordered a light beer. "How's Hank?" he asked. "Sandy said he was trying to get a job at Wells Fargo." "Oh, yeah, that came through. He's at orientation down in L.A. right now." The beer came and Will sipped. "Congratulations." A flash of white in the parking lot. Lara looked toward it quickly, alarmed. But the vehicle turned out to be a white Ford Explorer with a young couple inside. Her eyes focused past the Ford and scanned the street and the parking lots again, recalling that, on the way here, she'd glanced at the side of the van as it passed her when she'd turned into the restaurant's parking lot. There'd been a smear of something dark and reddish on the side; probably mud -- but she'd thought it almost looked like blood. "You okay?" Will asked. "Sure. Sorry." She turned back to him, glad she had an ally. Another of her urban protection rules: Two people are always better than one. Lara now modified that by adding, Even if one of them is a skinny geek who can't be more than five feet, ten inches tall and is wearing a cartoon tie. Will continued, "Sandy called me on my way home and asked if I'd stop by and give you a message. She tried to call you but couldn't get through on your cell. She's running late and asked if you could meet her at that place next to her office where you went last month, Ciro's? In Mountain View. She made a reservation at eight." "You didn't have to come by. She could've called the bartender." "She wanted me to give you the pictures I took at the wedding. You two can look at 'em tonight and tell me if you want any copies." Will noticed a friend across the bar and waved -- Silicon Valley may extend hundreds of square miles but it's really just a small town. He said to Lara, "Cheryl and I were going to bring the pictures this weekend to Sandy's place in Santa Barbara...." "Yeah, we're going down on Friday." Will paused and smiled as if he had a huge secret to share. He pulled his wallet out and flipped it open to a picture of himself, his wife and a very tiny, ruddy baby. "Last week," he said proudly. "Claire." "Oh, adorable," Lara whispered. "So we'll be staying pretty close to home for a while." "How's Cheryl?" "Fine. The baby's fine. There's nothing like it.... But, I'll tell you, being a father totally changes your life." "I'm sure it does." Lara glanced at the clock again. Seven-thirty. It was a half-hour drive to Ciro's this time of night. "I better get going." Then, with a thud of alarm, she thought again about the van and the driver. The dreadlocks. The rusty smear on the battered door.... Will gestured for the check and paid. "You don't have to do that," she said. "I'll get it." He laughed. "You already did." "What?" "That mutual fund you told me about at the wedding. The one you'd just bought?" Lara remembered shamelessly bragging about a biotech fund that had zoomed up 60 percent last year. "I got home from Nantucket and bought a shitload of it.... So... thanks." He tipped the beer toward her. Then he stood. "You all set?" "You bet." Lara stared uneasily at the door as they walked toward it. It was just paranoia, she told herself. She thought momentarily, as she did from time to time, that she should get a real job, like all of these people in the bar. She shouldn't dwell so much on the world of violence. Sure, just paranoia... But, if so, then why had the dreadlocked kid

sped off so fast when she'd pulled into the parking lot here and glanced at him? Will stepped outside and opened his umbrella. He held it up for both of them to use. Lara recalled another rule of urban protection: Never feel too embarrassed or proud to ask for help. And yet as Lara was about to ask Will Randolph to walk her to her car after they got the snapshots she had a thought: If the kid in the van really was a threat, wasn't it selfish of her to ask him to endanger himself? Here he was, a husband and new father, with other people depending on him. It seemed unfair to -- "Something wrong?" Will asked. "Not really." "You sure?" he persisted. "Well, I think somebody followed me here to the restaurant. Some kid." Will looked around. "You see him?" "Not now." He asked, "You have that Web site, right? About how women can protect themselves." "That's right." "You think he knows about it? Maybe he's harassing you." "Could be. You'd be surprised at the hate mail I get." He reached for his cell phone. "You want to call the police?" She debated. Never feel too embarrassed or proud to ask for help. "No, no. Just... would you mind, after we get the pictures, walking me to my car?" Will smiled. "Of course not. I don't exactly know karate but I can yell for help with the best of them." She laughed. "Thanks." They walked along the sidewalk in front of the restaurant and she checked out the cars. As in every parking lot in Silicon Valley there were dozens of Saabs, BMWs and Lexuses. No vans, though. No kids. No bloody smears. Will nodded toward where he'd parked, in the back lot. He said, "You see him?" "No." They walked past a stand of juniper and toward his car, a spotless silver Jaguar. Jesus, did everybody in Silicon Valley have money except her? He dug the keys out of his pocket. They walked to the trunk. "I only took two rolls at the wedding. But some of them are pretty good." He opened the trunk and paused and then looked around the parking lot. She did too. It was completely deserted. His was the only car there. Will glanced at her. "You were probably wondering about the dreads." "Dreads?" "Yeah," he said. "The dreadlocks." His voice was flatter, distracted. He was still smiling but his face was different now. It seemed hungry. "What do you mean?" she asked calmly but fear was detonating inside her. She noticed a chain was blocking the entrance to the back parking lot. And she knew he'd hooked it after he'd pulled in -- to make sure nobody else could park there. "It was a wig." Oh, Jesus, my Lord, thought Lara Gibson, who hadn't prayed in twenty years. He looked into her eyes, recording her fear. "I parked the Jag here a while ago then stole the van and followed you from home. With the combat jacket and wig on. You know, just so you'd get edgy and paranoid and want me to stay close.... I know all your rules -- that urban protection stuff. Never go into a deserted parking lot with a man. Married men with children are safer than single men. And my family portrait? In my wallet? I hacked it together from a picture in Parents magazine." She whispered hopelessly, "You're not... ?" "Sandy's cousin? Don't even know him. I picked Will Randolph because he's somebody you sort of know, who sort of looks like me. I mean, there's no way in the world I could've gotten you out here alone if you hadn't known me -- or thought you did. Oh, you can take your hand out of your purse." He held up her canister of pepper spray. "I got it when we were walking outside." "But..." Sobbing now, shoulders slumped in hopelessness. "Who are you? You don't even know me...." "Not true, Lara," he whispered, studying her anguish the way an imperious chess master examines his defeated opponent's face. "I know everything about you. Everything in the world." Copyright 2001 by Jeffery

Deaver