

Deciphering Russia's Take on Trump

by A.C. Frieden

Having studied in Russia years ago, and having recently launched my second spy novel there, I am interested in Russian perspectives on politics, conflicts and other hot topics. And particularly now when Russia is getting more attention from U.S. media than at any time since the Cold War. Donald Trump, of course, is the main reason for this scrutiny, though the complete picture of his relationship with Russia remains elusive.

Pictured: The headquarters of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, located in central Moscow.

The controversial 45th U.S. President entered the White House with lots of political baggage, from allegations of collusion with Russian officials to influence his election to possible conflicts of interest in the proposed Trump World Tower project in the Russian capital to alleged salacious sex acts in a Moscow hotel that handed Russian intelligence useful *Kompromat*—essentially, the ability to blackmail. Further, the ongoing Special Counsel investigation may find evidence that Trump's campaign team pre-negotiated a reduction or

removal of sanctions against Russia in violation the Logan Act. Whether Trump's potential misdeeds lead to impeachment is anyone's guess for the moment. But what is more decipherable is Vladimir Putin's take on Trump's presidency since the election, and one question he may be asking: Was it worth supporting Trump?

Even without the alleged wrongdoing, it's easy to see why Russia sided with Trump since the early days of the U.S. campaign. Seeing the rise of a brash, self-professed "great" businessman



The House of the Government of the Russian Federation, popularly known as the "White House."

who had previously sought to expand his real estate empire to Moscow, Saint Petersburg and elsewhere in Russia—and having heard Trump shower the Russian leader with praise for his leadership style—Putin clearly saw Trump's contrast with Hillary Clinton, who often derided Putin, once even comparing him to Adolf Hitler.

While Putin had frosty relations with the U.S. administration under George W. Bush, especially after the short war

with neighboring Georgia, and even worse relations with Obama following Russia's intervention in Ukraine, including its annexation of Crimea, the future—at least in Putin's eyes—looked even bleaker if Hillary were to reach the White House.

With this stark contrast growing over the course of the U.S. election campaign, Putin saw the opportunity—or necessity—to somehow influence its outcome. Perhaps he justified his aims by pointing to a long history of U.S. meddling in elections around the world, such as in Ukraine, Guatemala, Lebanon, Italy, Chile, and Russia's own 2006 election.

In any case, with Putin's approval, several Russian government officials unleashed an arsenal of unconventional political/technical weapons. These included a vast capability, particularly acting through non-state proxies, to hack servers across the U.S. in search of potentially damaging information on Hillary. The tactics also focused on studying vulnerabilities in the digital voting systems of various states in case Russia were to choose a more direct interference. But the most effective tactic was the propagation of fake or distorted news. These news pieces were mostly created by an army of English-proficient collaborators and disseminated by bots across America's vast social media networks. Many of the fake, misleading and exaggerated

stories were also blended into the "real" news cycles by Russia's various government-funded English-language TV channels and their websites and blogs. While the initial coordination in Russia was likely highly centralized, these news stories tended to spread in an uncoordinated fashion, especially after pro-Trump media, including bloggers and other online supporters, routinely circulated these stories through their own networks.

However, now that we approach the first anniversary of Trump's presidency, which already has suffered countless legislative and political defeats, resignations, firings, hostile Congressional action, inept press relations and the setbacks from Russia investigation, Putin can no longer expect a windfall from his strategy. Indeed, the U.S. is highly unlikely to ease sanctions against Russia in the near future. Further, the strained bilateral relations will diminish the chances of agreement over Syria, Ukraine and other hotspots of mutual strategic importance.

But it's not all bad news for Putin. Despite the lack of tangible benefits from Trump's election victory, Putin can find comfort knowing that Hillary is not in power. Her adversarial positions would have made Russia's Syrian adventure much riskier. Her policies also might have led to a direct military confrontation with Russia



A.C. Frieden visits the *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* Soviet-era Art Deco sculpture in Moscow. It was first displayed at the 1937 World's Fair in Paris.

over Ukraine or Syria. Maybe by virtue of Putin's nefarious actions, the likelihood of direct U.S.-Russia armed conflict has been reduced. That said, Putin still may be left guessing what real reasons Trump may have had for his enigmatic affection for Russia.

Notwithstanding the election allegations, what strategic reasons may Trump have had to cozy up to Russia? The possible answer: China. Trump may well see Russia as the only viable partner to contain China over the next decades. This could be based on genuine concern over China's growing power. One can also argue that Trump's defense of white supremacists further illustrates this anti-China stance (Russia's population is predominantly white).

Then there is Steve Bannon, until recently one of Trump's most influential advisors. He has advocated a confrontational stance against China, having recently said "one of us is going to be a hegemon in 25 or 30 years." Another Trump advisor, Peter Navarro, published several books on China, including *The Coming China Wars: Where They Will Be Fought and How They Can Be Won* and *Death by China: Confronting the Dragon—A Global Call to Action*. This anti-China bias is not too distant from the racist

pursuits of former Klansman David Duke, who's distorted view of the world sets Russia as a potential savior of the white race in the face of growing non-white populations. Trump may share their views, and this may be the driver of his pro-Russia stance during the election.

Regardless, China continues to spread its economic, political and military tentacles across the globe, much like America did following World War II, though at a slower pace. With China's rise, America's dominance will likely decline. At its current pace, China will become the top global superpower by the middle of this century. Trump's deep fear of China's rise may be the main reason he chose pro-Russia members of his inner circle, like Rex Tillerson, Michael Fynn and others, and tried to create a Russo-American pact to counter China. ⊕



Russia's capital now boasts an ultramodern business district called Moscow City.

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Notwithstanding the election-related allegations, what strategic reasons may Trump have had to cozy up to Russia?”

Merry Christmas, KGB style! The former headquarters of the KGB secret services at Lubyanka Square. The complex is now the headquarters of the Federal Security Services (FSB).





Inside Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Bunker

Eastern Europe is filled with historically significant sites from the Cold War, but a unique one is “Bunker 42,” a facility buried deep under central Moscow. Fifty-three years ago, at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev huddled with his

generals in the bunker's command center ready to order a nuclear strike against the United States. Such an order would have triggered massive retaliation—and Armageddon. Thankfully, this didn't happen, and today the bunker hosts only harmless, curious visitors.

Earlier this year Chicago-based thriller author A.C. Frieden visited Bunker 42 for his Cold War literary research. Officially known as the “Tangansky Protected Command Point” during its operational years, the underground complex is located 2 km (1.3 miles) from the Kremlin. From there it's a short walk along the scenic east bank of the Moskva River, though the Moskvoretskaya embankment can be windy and cold in fall, as it was in late October 1962, when the USSR and the U.S. were on the brink of nuclear war. During the 12-day Cuban Missile Crisis, Khrushchev traveled to and from the bunker in his armored Zil limousine and used one of several secret entrances into the complex.

Access to the complex today is from a nondescript, yellow-colored two-story building a couple blocks east of the river. Now visitors are greeted by a green metal door adorned with a red star. From there a tour guide takes them through a short passageway, past a tiny souvenir booth, and on through the first of several reinforced steel and concrete doors. The corridor then leads to the stairwell that descends 12 floors below ground (the deepest point is about 65 meters, or 212 feet). The air becomes noticeably stuffy below the seventh floor, but the temperature doesn't change much. Upon reaching the bottom, approximately 7,000 square metres (75,000 square feet) of once-secret, heavily reinforced galleries and tunnels await.

Construction of the bunker was started by Khrushchev's predecessor, Joseph Stalin, who wanted a hardened military facility to protect the Soviet Union's senior leadership in case of a nuclear attack by the United States. By the end of 1951, construction was in full swing. Government engineers employed the same techniques, materials and machinery that were being used to build the Moscow Metro system. In fact, to help conceal the bunker's development, many workers were disguised as metro construction staff and accessed the site through the nearby metro tunnel between the Kurskaya and Taganskaya stations.

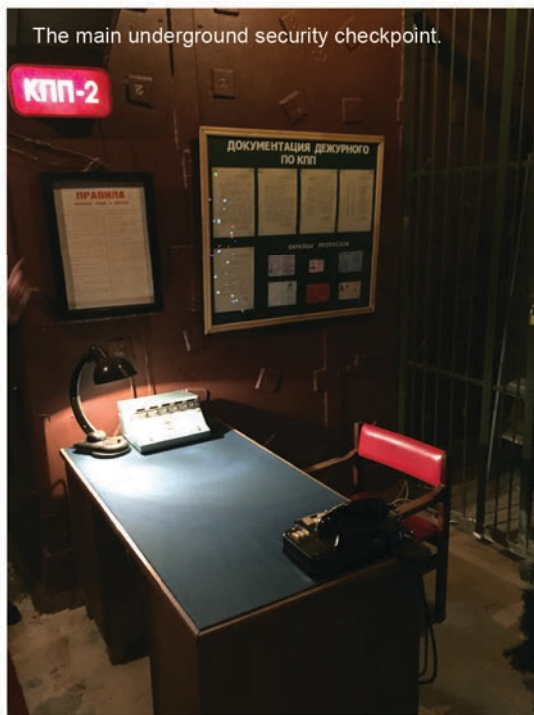
The complex was finally completed in 1956 and featured four large reinforced tunnels, or “blocks,” connected to numerous smaller tunnels and separated by blast doors. There were also extensive food and water storage spaces, air filtration systems, medical quarters, galleys, communications and command rooms as well as living quarters designed to keep approximately 3000 military and government personnel alive for three to four months in the event that a nuclear attack destroyed the city aboveground.

The facility would probably have survived a limited nuclear conflict, but any surface detonation of a large-yield nuclear warhead within a radius of 800 meters (a half-mile) would have likely killed most or all of those inside. The bunker remained operational into the 1960s and periodically received upgraded equipment. But when the Soviet military began building newer, deeper facilities on the outskirts of Moscow later that decade, Bunker 42 lost its relevance and was no longer maintained. It was declassified in 1995.

In 2006, the Russian government sold the complex to a private company, which turned it into a museum and entertainment facility after many years of renovations. Today, visitors have access to about 30 percent of the underground complex, which now also showcases a wide range of Soviet-era military artifacts, including a prototype of the USSR’s first atomic bomb, encrypted communications hardware of the time, Soviet propaganda posters, and other relics. Other parts of the facility serve as a restaurant and conference center, but the remaining areas are in a state of disrepair and not likely to be renovated or repurposed anytime soon.

Frieden has visited many underground military installations across the globe, including recently former nuclear missile bases in Ukraine and Arizona. Also, during his Swiss Army service, he accessed numerous state-of-the-art military bunkers, including two large facilities built deep in the Alps. ⊕

A.C. Frieden stands in the central armor-clad access tunnel connecting the main entry stairwell with the rest of the underground complex known as Bunker 42.



The ZSD Nysa vans, like the one pictured below, were produced in Poland from 1958 until 1994.



Stepping Back *into* Poland's Communist Past

The days when Soviet troops roamed freely across Poland and the communist government in Warsaw kept a firm grip on the country's political, economic and social fabric seem long gone. For many Poles, however, time has done little to erase the bitter memories of that difficult post-war period.

Soon after Nazi troops were pushed out of Poland and eventually defeated by the Allies and the Red Army, the Soviet Union instituted an interim communist government in Warsaw. This was done under the guise of a fair, democratic, electoral process. The Soviets also annexed portions of Poland's eastern regions and established permanent military bases across the country to house Soviet troops as part of what later became the Warsaw Pact alliance. Then, with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's approval, the People's Republic of Poland was officially named in 1952.

The communist government's control remained relatively unchallenged until the late 1970s, when the country's economy started to shrink and its foreign debt became unmanageable. This resulted in general discontent in its workforce, and a series of labor unrests ensued, mainly in the port city of Gdansk. By 1980 the growing turmoil helped form the independent trade union called *Solidarność* (Solidarity), which began to challenge the government's authority.

By the middle of 1981, Solidarity's membership exceeded 9.5 million,

The Old Town (upper center of picture) is one of the few areas of Warsaw to have survived the war, but the city's communist-era reconstruction is still the dominant architecture.



representing almost a third of Poland's labor force. Furthermore, given the West's interest at the time to weaken the Polish government, the U.S. (through the CIA) began secretly supporting Solidarity with money, equipment and training.

But things took a sudden turn on December 13, 1981. That day, with the Soviet Union's tacit approval, Polish General Wojciech Jaruzelski and his Military Council of National Salvation declared martial law. The action unleashed a brutal crackdown by army, paramilitary and police forces across the country. Consequently, the government tried to dismantle Solidarity, but the opposition movement remained strong and continued to grow after martial law ended in 1983.

As the Soviet Union's control over its satellite states in Eastern Europe weakened further toward the end of the decade, Poland was finally able to hold free elections. In 1990, the co-founder and former leader of Solidarity, Lech Walesa, was elected President of Poland.

Warsaw's Communist Era Architecture

Warsaw's architecture reflects the region's long history, including the changing styles, influences and also the consequences from various wars, foreign occupation, and changing borders and alliances. The city, in fact, traces its earliest inhabitants to the 6th century, and its first fortifications date back to the 9th century.

Nearly every European architecture style is represented in Warsaw, though many of these historical structures had to be rebuilt or restored following World War II. The Royal Castle and the Jesuit Church are examples of mannerist architecture that survived in the city's Old Town. The city also has several examples of baroque and rococo architecture. But to most visitors, the predominant architecture is the contemporary, socialist-influenced style that became part of just about all post-war reconstruction.

All over Warsaw you can find block-houses that are quite typical of former

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Several modern skyscrapers have been built recently in downtown Warsaw.



Warsaw's most iconic communist-era building is the Palace of Culture and Science, designed by Soviet architect Lev Rudnev built and built in 1955.



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communist countries. Generally, these buildings were built quite cost-effectively, but the emphasis on speed of construction and low-cost materials meant that the quality of the housing, especially plumbing and electrical systems, was no match to standards in the West.

Today, hundreds of these buildings in Warsaw and nearby towns are in dire need of substantial repair and renovation. Though some have been fully or partially renovated in recent years, a growing number of property developers are opting for a simpler, less expensive approach: demolition and new construction.

Communist Era Lifestyle and Consumer Goods

For curious Westerners and nostalgic Poles wanting to be immersed in the look and feel of a communist-era life, an exhibit on the outskirts of Warsaw is the perfect place. There, a typical living room, kitchen, office and even a small refreshment store have been recreated using original furnishings, accessories and products that were available in the 1970s/80s. Old books, newspapers, food packaging, cameras, radios, bicycles, and other consumer goods, as well as various patriotic symbols, also help to bring visitors back in time. The walls are also adorned with all kinds of authentic memorabilia, ranging from football jerseys to police riot gear. Every detail has been carefully preserved.

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① A.C. Frieden holds a copy of *Kapitan Kloss*, a popular secret agent comic book series by Mieczyslaw Wiśniewski.

② A.C. Frieden handles former police equipment used during the period of martial law.

③ Popular local brands of tobacco products from the communist era.

④ An example of socialist-style housing complexes that were built throughout Warsaw starting in the 1960s.

⑤ A.C. Frieden stands next to a Scud-C transport-erector-launcher and missile formerly used by the Polish military.



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Vestiges of the Warsaw Pact

Remnants of the communist era are also found in Poland's armed forces, which was an important contributor to the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. While the government has recently procured a significant amount of Western military hardware—and upgraded a portion of its domestically made equipment—some Soviet-made or designed material remains in service. The military museum in Warsaw has an extensive collection of Soviet-era aircraft and weapons systems recently retired from the Polish military. ⊕

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Qatar:

Inside the Middle East's Newly Ostracized State



Aerial view of The Pearl-Qatar, an artificial island with over 12,000 residents living in modern highrises next to harbors, shops and entertainment facilities.

Qatar's skyscrapers rise above the desert coastline like futuristic monuments, a testament to the small nation's economic and political prowess in a region known for its turmoil. But today, despite its successes, Qatar suddenly has been labeled a pariah state by its wealthier, more powerful neighbors—and this may dramatically reverse the nation's fortunes.

Thriller author A.C. Frieden recently spent a weekend in Qatar's capital, Doha, visiting key sites that he intends to use as settings for two upcoming novels: the still unnamed fifth installment in his Jonathan Brooks series and the launch book in his recently announced Kaden Black spy thriller series. Frieden's research included visits of some of the city's most fascinating locations, such as the skyscraper-filled downtown financial district and the artificial island known as The Pearl-Qatar (which is actually a series of developments, including The Pearl, Porto Arabia, Bahriya, Qanat Quartier, West Bay, and Isola Dana). Frieden also visited Lusail City, a 15-square-mile area that includes four newly developed islands that will eventually include many residential and commercial buildings and a port.

During his stay, Frieden also toured the Museum of Islamic Art, a modern structure influenced by ancient Islamic architecture located on an man-made peninsula on the southern end of Doha Bay. The museum's collections include Islamic artifacts from the Persian Gulf region, North Africa, Turkey, India and Central Asia spanning a period of 14 centuries. It opened to the public in 2008.

Frieden also spent time at the Imam Abd al-Wahhab Mosque (also known as the Qatar State Mosque), a huge, modern mosque opened in 2011 that can accommodate up to 30,000 worshippers. Since it opened, it has hosted several highly controversial sermons by well-known regional religious leaders. Moreover, some of the mosque's worshippers and visiting clerics have become targets of the CIA's clandestine surveillance.

More recently, Saudi and UAE officials have accused Qatar of aiding terrorist organizations and supporting Iran's intelligence operations. As a consequence, Qatar's banks, religious institutions, air transportation and port facilities, and government offices have come under increased scrutiny by U.S., Israeli, Russian and British intelligence services.

The Al Fanar Qatar Islamic Culture Center located near the old town.



Patrons enjoying a quiet afternoon in one of The Pearl's coffee shops.

From his hotel room novelist A.C. Frieden overlooks modern skyscrapers along Doha's 4-mile long bayfront Corniche.



Today, Qatar is attempting to survive an aggressive commercial, political and diplomatic chokehold imposed by its Arab neighbors. Among the most difficult measures is Saudi Arabia's move to severely restrict access to its airspace by Qatar-based airlines, disrupting its civil air transport links with the outside world. This is in addition to Saudi border closures and sea lane restrictions.

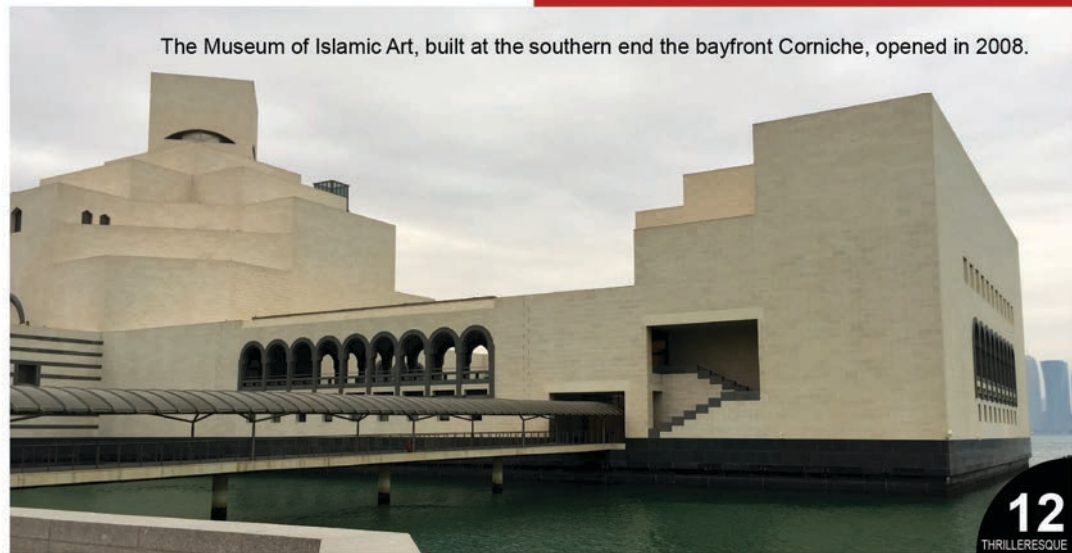
By the end of September, over ten countries had severed or downgraded diplomatic ties with Qatar, leaving only the U.S., Europeans, and Russians to broker a settlement. "Qatar's recent troubles are indicative of the rivalries that exist amongst the ruling elites in the region," said Frieden, "and it also shows that America's considerable diplomatic power isn't enough to resolve this dispute."

So how will this turn out? Western companies and the U.S. military all

have substantial investments in Qatar and in general seek greater stability in a region already rocked by conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. While this move to ostracize Qatar may have been a knee-jerk reaction to unproven allegations by its Arab neighbors, most Western governments haven't jumped on the bandwagon for fear that prolonging the crisis may lead to broader problems in the region. ⊕

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The Museum of Islamic Art, built at the southern end the bayfront Corniche, opened in 2008.



Exploring Bangalore, Asia's Silicon Valley



Formerly a cherished destination for retirees, Bangalore has over the past twenty years transformed itself into Asia's Information Technology hub. Located in Southern India, this fast-paced city of over 11 million people continues to attract investment and talent from around the world.



When you ask anyone who has been to Bangalore, India's third largest city by population, to name the three things that most struck them about the city, most would say the following: the traffic congestion is terrible, the weather is nearly perfect, and the place is the world's second most important center of innovation for information technology, after Silicon Valley in California.

Over the last twenty years, the growing demand in the U.S. and Europe for inexpensive software engineering talent and cost-effective IT managed services to support their businesses allowed Bangalore to grow as an outsourcing center. The infusion of cash from foreign companies helped IT firms grow. Consequently, Bangalore began attracting foreign companies with significant IT needs to estab-

lish a local presence. And this growth continues today, giving Bangalore an internationally recognized position as a tech hub.

One question that is often asked is whether this growth is sustainable. Will IT change in such a way that hubs like Bangalore or Silicon Valley or other such places will be less relevant? Will Bangalore's ever-growing traffic

problems make the city less attractive? Or perhaps, will the city lose out to increasingly competitive cities in India and elsewhere that are vying for IT companies? There is no definitive answer to these questions at this time, but many leaders in Bangalore's tech community are helping the city remain competitive and business-friendly.

Bangalore's success in IT is sustained in part by the large number of local educational and research institutions, including the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Indian Institute of Management (Bangalore) (IIMB), the National Institute of Fashion Technology, the National Institute of Design, Bangalore, the National Law School of India University (NLSIU) and a



The eastern part of Bangalore, pictured here, is growing at a rapid pace.



large number of other technical institutions focusing on information technology. There also are many state-owned tech-focused enterprises, such as aerospace and defence firms, like Hindustan Aeronautics, Bharat Electronics, and the National Aerospace Laboratories. The city's infrastructure development also adds to its tech image, with numerous large construction projects underway, like its new metro and several new tech parks.

(left) Novelist-lawyer A.C. Frieden rides Bangalore's new *Namma Metro*, a modern mass transit system used by over 320,000 commuters daily.

(below) One of many large residential complexes under construction in northeast Bangalore.

Novelist-lawyer A.C. Frieden, whose work brings him to Bangalore several times a year, finds the city's ongoing development rather impressive. "You can often gauge a city's growth by the number of cranes you see," said Frieden while surveying the city from the rooftop of his hotel. "In fact, I can see thirty-two right now, with only with a 180-degree perspective—that's striking." He expects Bangalore's economic growth to continue, and in connection with IT, he finds the city to be well positioned to compete as the industry expands its emphasis on Artificial Intelligence and Automation solutions. ⊕

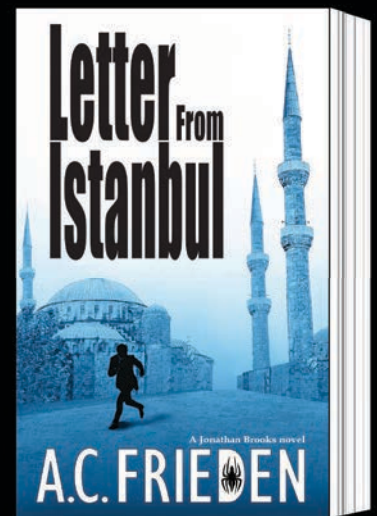
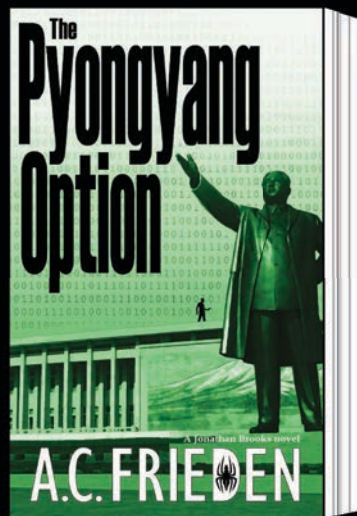
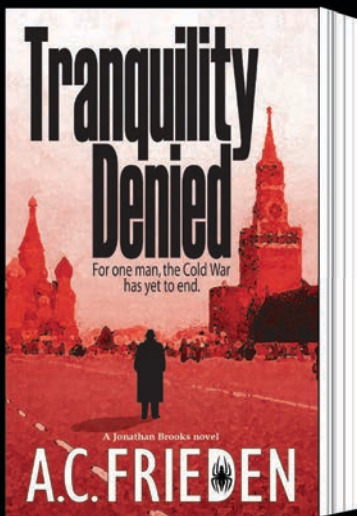




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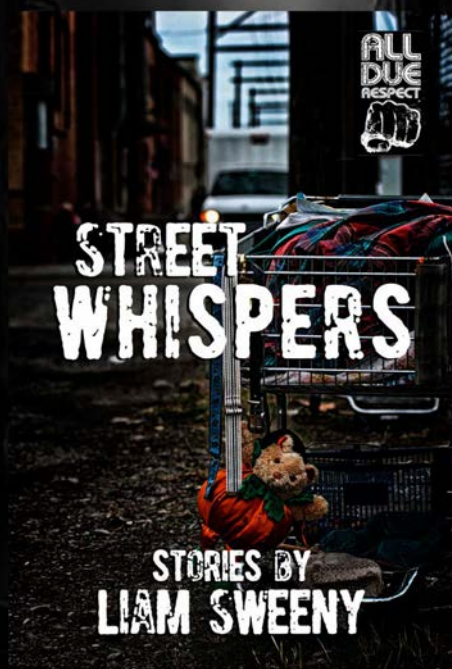
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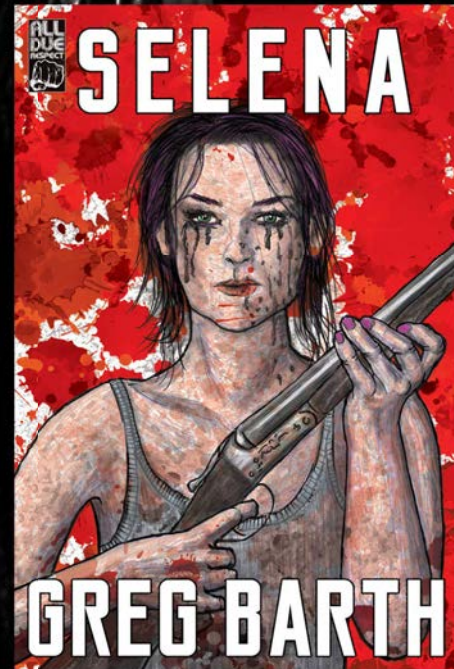
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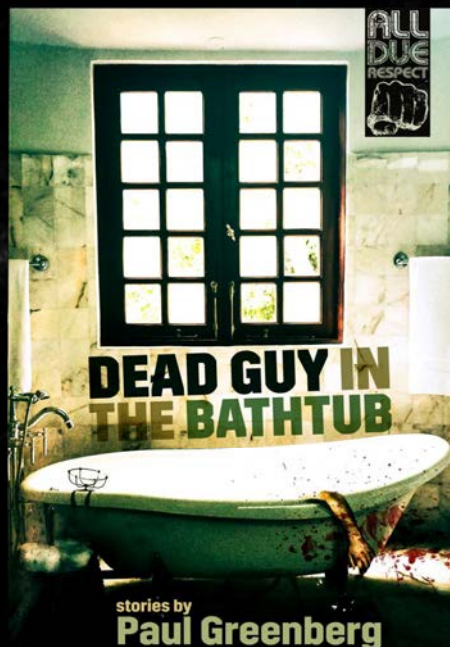
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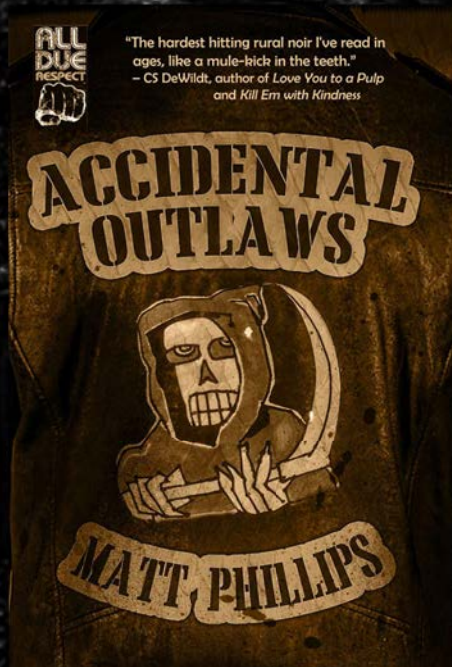
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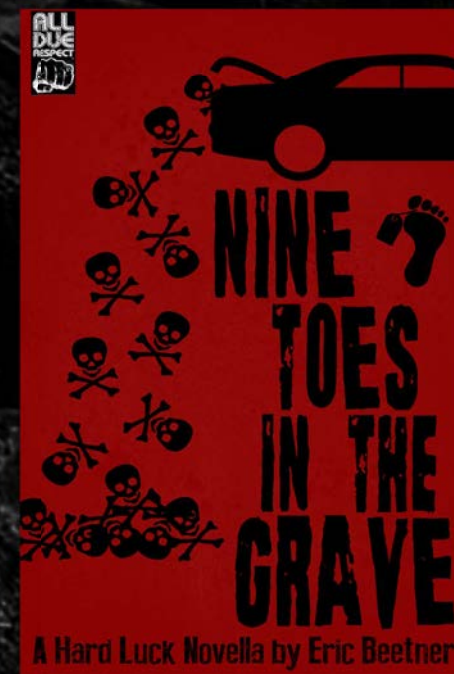
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