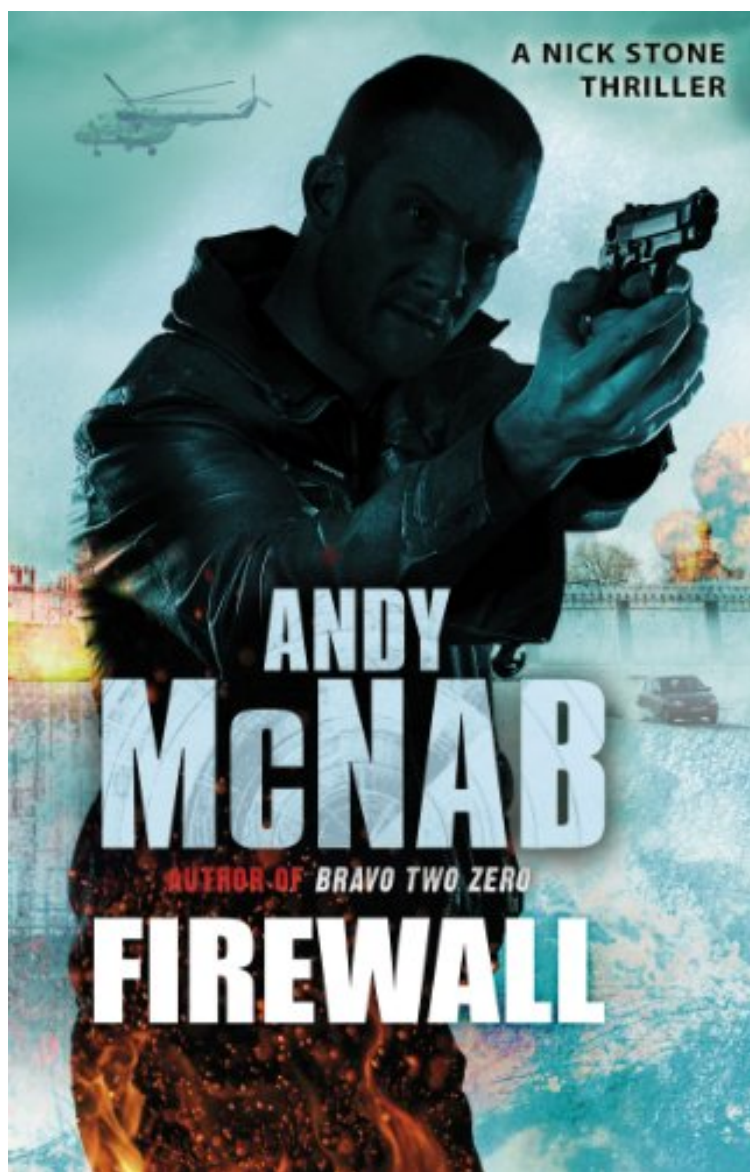


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Firewall: (Nick Stone Thriller 3)



Par Andy McNab

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Par Andy McNab : Firewall: (Nick Stone Thriller 3) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Firewall: (Nick Stone Thriller 3):

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe bestselling Nick Stone thriller from the author of Bravo Two Zero.Tough, resourceful and ruthless, ex-SAS trooper Nick Stone is now working for British Intelligence on deniable operations. And is desperately in need of cash.When he is offered a lucrative freelance job, Stone thinks his problems are over. All he needs to do is kidnap a Russian mafia warlord.And so Stone is thrust into the grim underworld of Estonia, with unknown aggressors stalking the Arctic landscape. Russia has launched a cyber-espionage attack, hacking into the West's most sensitive military secrets. Stone must stop them. But the mafia are waiting in the wings with their own chillingly brutal solution...'Authentic to the core' Daily Express.comIn his third outing (following Remote Control and Crisis Four), Nick Stone, Andy McNab's

series SAS agent, is off the Firm's regular payroll owing to a major screwup in his last assignment that left his best friend's family slaughtered--except for the one child who survived. Little Kelly needs expensive treatment for the post-traumatic stress that's turned her nearly catatonic, so Nick takes on a freelance assignment that gets him mixed up with Russian organized crime--in particular, with an enigmatic mob boss who has designs on some Finnish cybertechnology. When Nick realizes it's not industrial espionage that he's involved with but military secrets, he's caught between warring factions of the Russian Mafia and the Anglo-American alliance of intelligence agencies. The Westerners will do anything to keep the Echelon program out of the hands of Valentin Lebed--the Chechnyan Mafioso who makes Nick an offer he can't refuse--and the Maliskia, a gang of rival Russian criminals who want to derail Lebed's plans and take over Echelon themselves. The action ranges from Helsinki to St. Petersburg to London, the weaponry is fully detailed, and the techniques of infiltration and retrieval carefully outlined; McNab, a former SAS commando who, according to the author's note "is still wanted by a number of terrorist organizations and is therefore forbidden to reveal his face or current location," obviously remembers every ache, pain, bruise, and injury he suffered in his life of derring-do, since they're all completely and graphically described here, too. --Jane Adams

Extrait 1 HELSINKI, FINLAND Monday, 6 December 1999

The Russians were serious players. If things didn't go as planned, Sergei said, I'd be lucky to be shot dead in the hotel lobby. If they captured me, I'd be taken to a remote bit of wasteland and have my stomach slit open. They'd pull my intestines out and leave me to watch them squirm around on my chest like a bucket of freshly caught eels for the thirty minutes it would take me to die. These things happen, he had explained, when you mess with the main men in ROC (Russian organized crime). But I didn't have a choice; I desperately needed the cash. 'What's it called again, Sergei?' I mimed the disembowelment. Eyes staring straight ahead, he gave a brief, sombre smile and muttered, 'Vikings revenge.' It was just before 7 p.m. and it had already been dark for three and a half-hours. The air temperature had been well below freezing all day; it hadn't snowed for a while, but there was still a lot of the stuff about, ploughed to the sides of the roads. The two of us had been sitting very still for the best part of an hour. Until I'd just spoken, our breathing was the only sign of movement. We were parked two blocks away from the Intercontinental hotel, using the shadows between the street lights to conceal our presence in the dirty black Nissan 4x4. The rear seats were down flat to make it easier to bundle the target inside, complete with me wrapped round him like a wrestler to keep him there. The 4x4 was sterile: no prints and completely empty apart from the trauma pack lying on the folded seats. Our boy had to be delivered across the border alive, and a couple of litres of Ringer's Solution might come in handy if this job turned into a gangfuck. Right now, it certainly had all the ingredients of one. I found myself hoping it wouldn't be me needing the infusion. It had been a while since I'd felt the need to pre-canulate, making it quicker for me to replace any fluid from gunshot wounds, but today had just that feel about it. I'd brought a catheter from the UK and it was already inserted into a vein under my left forearm, secured by tape and protected by Tubigrip. Anti-coagulant was preloaded inside the catheter's needle and chamber to stop the blood that filled it from clotting. Ringer's Solution isn't as good as plasma to replace blood loss - it's only a saline mix - but I didn't want anything plasma-based. Russian quality control was a contradiction in terms, and money was what I wanted to return to the UK with, not HIV. I'd spent enough time in Africa not treating anyone's gunshot wounds because of the risk of infection, and I wasn't about to let it happen now. We sat facing Mannerheimintie, 200 metres down the hill from our position. The boulevard was the main drag into the city centre, just fifteen minutes' walk away to the right. It carried a constant stream of slow, obedient traffic each side of the tram lines. Up here it was like a different world. Low-level apartment blocks hugged each side of the quiet street and an inverted 'V' of white Christmas lights sparkled in almost every window. People walked past, straining under the weight of their shopping, crammed into large carrier bags with pictures of holly and Santa. They didn't notice us as they headed home to their smart apartments; they were too busy keeping their footing on the icy pavements and their heads down against the wind that howled and buffeted the 4x4. The engine had been off all the time we'd been here, and it was like sitting in a fridge. Our breath billowed like low cloud as we waited. I kept visualizing how, when and where I was going to do my stuff, and more importantly, what I was going to do if things got fucked up. Once the target has been selected the basic sequence of a kidnap is nearly always the same. First comes reconnaissance; second, abduction; third, detention; fourth, negotiation; fifth, ransom payment, and finally, release - though sometimes that doesn't happen. My job was to plan and implement the first three phases; the rest of the task was out of my hands. Three members of the loud-tie-and-braces brigade from a private bank had approached me in London. They'd been given my name by an ex-Regiment mate who now worked for one of the big security

companies, and who'd been nice enough to recommend me when this particular commission had been declined. 'Britain', they said to me as we sat at a window table in the roof bar of the Hilton, looking down on to the gardens of Buckingham Palace, 'is facing an explosion in Russian mafia-organized crime. London is a money-laundering haven. The ROC are moving as much as 20 billion through the City each year, and up to 200 of their senior players either live in Britain or visit regularly.' The executives went on to say they'd discovered that millions had been channelled through Valentin Lebed's accounts at their bank in just three years. They didn't like that, and were none too keen on the thought of the boys with the blue flashing lights paying him a visit and seeing the name on all his paying-in slips. Their solution was to have Val lifted and taken to St Petersburg, where, I presumed, they had either made arrangements to persuade him to move his account to a different bank, or to channel even more through them to make the risk more acceptable. Whichever, I didn't give a fuck so long as I got paid. I looked over at Sergei. His eyes glinted as he stared at the traffic below us and his Adam's apple moved as he swallowed. There wasn't anything left to say; we'd done enough talking during the two-week build-up. It was now time to do. The conference of European Council members was due to start in Helsinki in two days. Blue EU flags already lined the main roads, and large black convoys of Eurocrats drove around with motorcycle outriders, heading from pre-meeting to pre-meeting. The police had set up diversions to control the flow of traffic around the city, and orange reflective cones and barriers were springing up everywhere. I'd already had to change our escape route twice because of it. Like all the high-class hotels, the Intercontinental was housing the exodus from Brussels. All the suits had been in the city since last week, wheeling and dealing so that when the heads of state hit town, all they'd have to do was politely refuse Tony Blair's invitation to eat British beef at some dinner for the media, then leave. All very good, but for me security around here was tighter than a duck's arse everything from sealed manholes to prevent bombs being planted to a heavy police presence on the streets. They would certainly have contingency plans for every possible event, especially armed attack. Sergei had a folding-stock AK a Russian automatic, 7.62mm short assault rifle - under his feet. His cropped, thinning brown hair was covered by a dark-blue woollen hat, and the old Soviet Army body armour he wore under his duvet jacket made him look like the Michelin man. If Hollywood was looking for a Russian hard head, Sergei would win the screen test every time. Late forties, square jaw, high cheekbones and blue eyes that didn't just pierce, they chopped you into tiny pieces. The only reason he would never be a leading man was his badly pockmarked skin. Either he'd steered away from the Clearasil in his youth or he'd been burned; I couldn't tell, and I didn't want to ask. He was a hard, reliable man, and one I felt it was OK to do business with, but he wasn't going to be on my Christmas-card list. I had read about Sergei Lysenkov's freelance activities in Intelligence Service reports. He had been a member of Spetnaz's Alpha Group, an elite of special-forces officers within the KGB, who used to be deployed wherever Moscow's power was under threat or there were wars of expansion. When hardline heads of the KGB led the 1991 coup in Moscow, they ordered Alpha Group to kill Yeltsin as he held out in the Russian White House, but Sergei and his mates decided that enough was enough and that the politicians were all as bad as each other. They disobeyed the order, the coup failed, and when Yeltsin learned what had nearly happened he took them under his direct command, cutting their power by turning them into his own bodyguards. Sergei decided to quit and make his experience and knowledge available to the highest bidder, and today that was me. It had been easy enough to make contact: I just went to Moscow and asked a few security companies where I could find him. I needed Russians on the team because I needed to know how Russians think, how Russians do. And when I discovered that Valentin Lebed would be in Helsinki for twenty-four hours of R and R, and not in his fortress in St Petersburg, Sergei was the only one who could organize vehicles, weapons and the bribing of border guards in the time available. The people who'd briefed me on the job had done their homework well. Valentin Lebed, they were able to tell me, had been smart during the fall of communism. Unlike some of his gaucher colleagues, he didn't keep the designer labels on the sleeves of his new suit to show how much it had cost. His rise was brutal and meteoric; within two years he was one of the dozen heads of the 'mafocracy' who had made ROC so powerful around the world. Lebed's firm employed only ex-KGB agents overseas, using their skills and experience to run international crime like a military operation. Coming from dirt-poor beginnings as a farmer's son in Chechnya, he'd fought against the Russians in the mid-Nineties war. His fame was sealed after rallying his men by making them watch Braveheart time and time again as the Russians bombed them day after day. He even painted his face half blue when attacking. After the war he'd had other ideas, all of them involving US dollars, and the place he'd chosen to realize them was St Petersburg. Much of his money came from arms dealing, extortion and a string of nightclubs he owned in Moscow and elsewhere, which

served as fronts for prostitution rackets. Jewellery businesses he had 'acquired' in Eastern Europe were used as a fron...