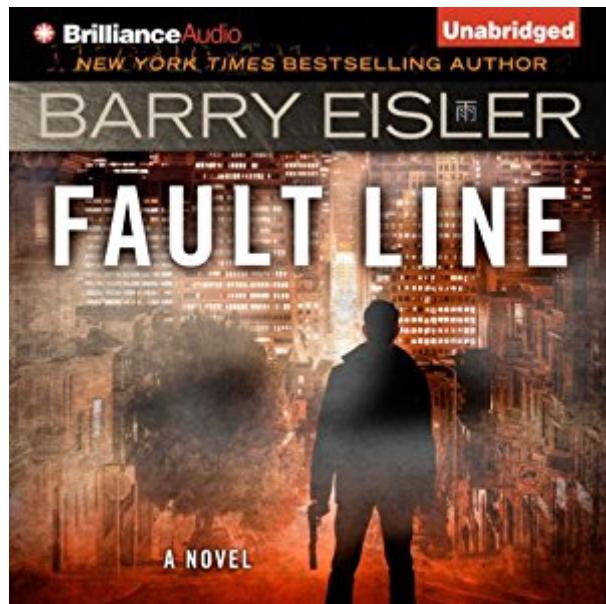


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Fault Line: Ben Treven, Book 1



Synopsis

In Silicon Valley, the eccentric inventor of a new encryption application is murdered in an apparent drug deal. In Istanbul, a cynical undercover operator receives a frantic call from his estranged brother, a patent lawyer who believes he is the next victim. And on the sun-drenched slopes of Sand Hill Road, Silicon Valley's nerve center of money and technology, old family hurts sting anew as two brothers who share nothing but blood and bitterness wage a desperate battle against a faceless enemy. Alex Treven has sacrificed everything to achieve his sole ambition: making partner in his high-tech law firm. But then the inventor of a technology Alex is banking on is murdered...and the patent examiner who reviewed it dies...and Alex himself narrowly escapes an attack in his own home. Off balance, out of ideas, and running out of time, he knows the one person who can help him is the last person he'd ever ask: his brother. Ben Treven is a Military Liaison Element, an elite undercover soldier paid to "find, fix, and finish" high-value targets in America's Global War on Terror. Disenchanted with what he sees as America's culture of denial and decadence, Ben lives his detached life in the shadows because the black ops world is all he really knows - and because other than Alex, who he hasn't spoken to since their mother died, his family is long gone. But blood is thicker than water, and when he receives Alex's frantic call, Ben hurries to San Francisco to help him. Only then does Alex reveal that there's another player who knows of the technology: Sarah Hosseini, a young Iranian American lawyer who Alex has long secretly desired...and who Ben immediately distrusts. As these three radically different people struggle to identify the forces attempting to silence them, Ben and Alex are forced to examine the events that drove them apart - even as Sarah's presence, and her own secret wants, deepens the fault line between them. Fault Line centers on a conspiracy that has spun out of the shadows and into the streets of America, a conspiracy that can be stopped only by three people - three people with different worldviews, different grievances, different motives. To survive the forces arrayed against them, they'll first have to survive each other.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have to start up by saying that I am a huge fan of Barry Eisler. I have greatly enjoyed all six of his Jack Rain novels (highly recommended to anyone!) so my expectations were high even though I knew this was to be a break from that story arc. Having said that, I have to confess that I found FAULT LINE to be a disappointment. Alex is in trouble. He is a lawyer and his client's software under patent seems to have triggered a murderous spree and the list includes his name. Conveniently, his older brother, Ben, is a CIA wet-works operator that has just completed a semi-successful op in Istanbul. Although estranged and barely on speaking terms (not to mention unaware of his brother's true occupation!), Ben is the one Alex calls when it hits the fan. And even if suspension-of-disbelief requirements were not high enough, here come yet another couple of things that gum up this novel from working. First off, the brothers' back story: it seems to drag on and on forever. We are well past the middle of the book when the narration of events from that fateful night is finally completed. And the switching of perspectives from one brother to the other, not something I would try again. It only manages to add excessive emotional details to an action novel, and without really strengthening anyone's motivation. I suspect that, this being the first book of the new Ben Traven series, it had to suffer a little in the heavy background department; nevertheless, it could have been done more subtly and concisely. Secondly, there is no such thing as an action novel/political treatise hybrid - and when attempted it simply does not work. Barry's political observations (although accurate and valid) cannot be supported in an action novel. I doubt that any young Iranian lawyer under mortal threat would vent her liberalism on the only man standing between her and her killers because ...she found his employment actions unsanctioned and unconstitutional, even if they clearly are. And any such intelligence professional would have walked away from such a thankless task long before he had to reload his Glock 27. Whenever there is a tactical situation or an action sequence, that is where Barry Eisler's strengths shine. He is one of the few contemporary writers that can choreograph a close combat scene so beautifully and then describe it in a way that puts you in the thick of it, leaving you looking for bruises on your body and blood spays on your clothes when it is over. Unfortunately, this

is not a book that brings out his talents enough. As someone disillusioned from both the trapping of modern "democracy" and the pseudo-fight between the left and the right, Barry seems to be blossoming into an excellent anarchist. Unfortunately, such insights belong more to a political Blog than an action novel. I love Barry Eisler's works. I just did not love this one.

Most anything written by Barry Eisler is extraordinary in terms of suspense and detailed immediacy, no matter what the setting for the violent and deadly confrontations facing the protagonist. In this case it was a new assassin, Ben Treven, an American army E-8 whose family tragedy he feels responsible for, and has embarked on a career of assigned killing for the cause of anti-terrorism. He returns to his California home when his estranged brother calls him for help after attempts on his life. What distinguishes this book from the others about John Rain is Ben's detailed agonizing about family dynamics following the death of his sister that he may have been responsible for. The book is narrated in the third person, rather than John Rain's first person narrative. The interactions between Ben and his untrained, civilian younger brother have the effect of humanizing the killing machine Ben has become, without losing any of the suspenseful action as he takes on seemingly impossible odds. The book has a surprise twist at the end that is satisfactorily resolved, and there is an introduction to future adventures that Ben will encounter in two or more following books. I would say that Ben gives the reader an even more accessible protagonist than John Rain, given that he has a family and a flawed moral background that haunts his consciousness as he considers each episode in his career.

Brothers Ben and Alex are light-years apart in personality and perspective, so when Alex's legal client is murdered for his encryption software, he turns to brother Ben for his Black Ops background despite years of estrangement. Old family roles and tons of unspoken hurts & bitterness become obstacles in keeping them both alive and Alex's crush on a work colleague clouds the picture too.

A worthy kickoff to the Ben Treven series, and a good read, to boot. Eisler continues to impress with his ability to tell a story and to develop characters. A note to Eisler readers just starting Treven: if you haven't read *The Detachment*, I'd read it first. It isn't absolutely necessary, but I think knowing too much about the Ben Treven when reading the *Detachment* might actually detract from the story somewhat. My fear was that the Treven series would just be a John Rain reboot, but such is not the case. Treven is a very different character, and Eisler makes it absolutely clear from the beginning. While *Fault Line* will not disappoint any of Eisler's fans, I find myself missing John Rain here and

there throughout the book- Treven is a great character, but more flawed in real ways than Rain, and with more baggage and insecurities. He's probably a more complex character than Rain for that reason, and therefore more of the writing is devoted to Treven than to his exploits. A great story, a great character, and - I hope - a long series of new books from Barry Eisler.

This first story in the Ben Treven series seems greatly watered down in sophistication and writing compared to the many John Rain books I enjoyed. The plot, violence, and sex all seemed "cartoony" and phoned in to me. I particularly disliked the awkward and telegraphed hook-up between Ben and Sarah -- the culminating scene bordered on a pretty ugly stereotypical macho rape fantasy (in my opinion). Anyway, it's unlikely that my tastes have matured, so I have to conclude that the new Ben Treven series just isn't as well written as I expected. I don't think I'll read more of these. Too bad -- I was looking forward to more of Eisler's smart stuff.

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