



Apprentice in Death

By J. D. Robb

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THE #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Lieutenant Eve Dallas must hunt down the deadly snipers terrorizing Manhattan in this fast-paced In Death thriller from J. D. Robb.

The shots came quickly, silently, and with deadly accuracy. Within seconds, three people were dead at Central Park's ice-skating rink. The victims: a talented young skater, a doctor, and a teacher. As random as random can be.

Eve Dallas has seen a lot of killers during her time with the NYPSD but never one like this. A review of the security videos reveals that the victims were killed with a tactical laser rifle fired by a sniper, who could have been miles away when the trigger was pulled. And though the list of locations where the shooter could have set up seems endless, the number of people with that particular skill set is finite: police, military, professional killer.

Eve's husband, Roarke, has unlimited resources—and genius—at his disposal. And when his computer program leads Eve to the location of the sniper, she learns a shocking fact: There were two—one older, one younger. Someone is being trained by an expert in the science of killing, and they have an agenda. Central Park was just a warm-up. And as another sniper attack shakes the city to its core, Eve realizes that though we're all shaped by the people around us, there are those who are just born evil...

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Editorial Review

Review

“Exceptional...Robb is in peak form as she blends intense action and clever twists with a stellar cast headed by the indomitable Lt. Eve Dallas.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“Outstanding...Robb does her usual amazing job delivering not only a complex police procedural, but also exploring the factors that can lead to the development of a killer. No one does futuristic suspense better than Robb!”—*RT Book Reviews* (4 ½ stars, Top Pick)

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“J. D. Robb’s In Death novels are can’t-miss pleasures.”—#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Harlan Coben

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About the Author

J. D. Robb is the pseudonym for a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of more than 200 novels, including the bestselling In Death series. There are more than 500 million copies of her books in print.

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1

When Lieutenant Eve Dallas strode into the bullpen of Homicide after an annoying appearance in court, she wanted coffee. But Detective Jenkinson had obviously been lying in wait. He popped up from his desk, started toward her, leading with his obnoxious tie of the day.

“Are those frogs?” she demanded. “Why would you wear a tie with piss-yellow frogs jumping around on—Christ—puke-green lily pads?”

“Frogs are good luck. It’s feng shui or some shit. Anyways, the fresh meat you brought in took a pop in the eye from some chemi-head down on Avenue B. She and Uniform Carmichael hauled him and the dealer in. They’re in the tank. New girl’s in the break room with an ice patch. Figured you’d want to know.”

Fresh meat equaled the newly transferred Officer Shelby. “How’d she handle it?”

“Like a cop. She’s all right, LT.”

“Good to know.”

She really wanted coffee—and not crap break-room coffee, but the *real* coffee in her office AutoChef. But she’d brought Officer Shelby on board, and on her first full day she’d taken a fist in the eye.

So Eve, tall and lanky in her black leather coat, walked to the break room.

Inside, Shelby sat drinking crap coffee, squinting at her PPC while wearing a cold patch over her right eye. She started to get to her feet, but Eve gestured her down.

“How’s the eye, Officer?”

“My kid sister hits harder, Lieutenant.”

At Eve’s finger motion, Shelby lifted the patch.

The bloodshot white, the black and purple raying out from it had Eve nodding. “That’s a nice one. Stick with the patch awhile.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good work.”

“Thank you, sir.”

On the way to her office, she stopped by Uniform Carmichael’s cube. “Run it through for me.”

“Detectives Carmichael and Santiago caught one down on Avenue B. We’re support, just crowd control. We spot the illegals deal going down, five feet away. Can’t just ignore it, but since we’ve got a body coming out, we’re just going to move them along. Dealer? He’s hands up, no problem. Chemi-head’s jonesing some, and he just punched her. Sucker punch, sir. She took him down, and fast, I’ll give her that. A little bit on the reckless side, maybe, but it’s her eye his fist punched. We hauled them both in, with assaulting an officer added to the dooper.

“She can take a punch,” Uniform Carmichael added. “I’ll give her that, too.”

“Keep her tight for a few days, and let’s see how she rolls.”

Before somebody else wanted her for anything else, Eve cut straight through to her office. She programmed coffee, black, without bothering to take off her coat.

She stood by her skinny window drinking the coffee, her whiskey-colored cop’s eyes scanning the street traffic below, the sky traffic above.

She had paperwork—there was always paperwork—and she’d get to it. But she had just closed an ugly case, and had spent the morning testifying over another ugly case. She supposed they were all ugly, but some twisted harder than others.

So she wanted a minute with her coffee and the city she’d sworn to protect and serve.

Maybe, if she was lucky, a quiet night would follow. Just her and Roarke, she thought. Some wine, some dinner, maybe a vid, some sex. When a murder cop ended up with a busy, billionaire businessman, quiet nights at home were like the biggest, shiniest prize in the box.

Thank God he wanted those quiet nights, too.

Maybe sometimes they did the fancy bits—it was part of the deal, part of the Marriage Rules in her book. And more than sometimes he worked with her over pizza in her home office. The reformed criminal with the mind of a cop? A hell of a tool.

So maybe a quiet night for both of them.

She set the coffee on her desk, took off her coat and tossed it over her deliberately uncomfortable visitor's chair. Paperwork, she reminded herself, and started to rake her hand through her hair. Hit the snowflake hat she tried not to let embarrass her. After tossing that on top of the coat, she finger-combed her short, choppy cap of brown hair, sat.

"Computer," she began, and her desk 'link sounded.

"Dallas."

"Dispatch, Dallas, Lieutenant Eve."

Even before the rest, she knew the shiny prize would have to stay in the box for a while.

With her partner, Eve walked from Sixth Avenue where she'd double-parked her DLE.

With a scarf of purple-and-green zigzags wrapped around her neck, Peabody clomped along the path, shooting unhappy looks at the snow blanketing everything else.

"I figured, hey, we'll be in court, and we got temps in the forties, I can wear my cowgirl boots no problem. If we've got to go tramping through the snow—"

"It's January. And what cop wears pink to a murder trial?"

"Reo had on red shoes," Peabody pointed out, referring to the APA. "Red's just dark pink when you think about it."

When Eve thought about it, she wondered why the hell they were talking about footwear when they had three DBs on tap. "Suck it up."

She flashed her badge when they came to the first police line, kept walking—ignored reporters who pushed against that line and shouted questions.

Somebody had their head on right, she decided, holding the media hounds back out of sight of the rink. That wouldn't last, but it kept what was bound to be complicated a little simpler for the time being.

She spotted more than a dozen uniforms coming or going and at least fifty civilians. Raised voices, a few edged with hysteria, carried clearly.

“I thought we’d have more civilians, more witnesses.”

Eve kept scanning. “Bodies drop, people run. We probably lost half of them before the first-on-scene got here.” She shook her head. “Media doesn’t need to get within camera range. They’re going to have dozens of people sending them vids.”

Since nothing could be done about that, Eve set it aside, flashed through the next barricade.

As she did, a uniform peeled off, lumbered toward her. She recognized the thirty-plus-years vet, and knew the relative order established was due to his experience and no-bullshit style.

“Fericke.”

He gave her a nod. He had a dark bulldog face on a broad-chested bulldog body. And eyes of bitter chocolate-brown that had seen it all, and expected to see worse at any moment.

“Hell of a mess.”

“Run it through for me.”

“Got the first dispatch at ’round fifteen-twenty. I’m baby-walking a rook, and had him doing some foot patrol on Sixth, so we hotfooted it. Had him start a line back aways, keep people out. But Christ on a crutch, you can’t block the whole freaking park.”

“You’re first-on-scene.”

“Yeah. Nine-one-ones started pumping in and so did cops, but people were already running from the scene when I got here. Had to work with park security to hold what we could. Had some injuries. We got MTs in to treat the minors, but we had a kid, about six, broken leg. The way the wit reports shake out—once you cut through the crap—is the first vic collided with him and the kid’s parents, and the kid’s leg got broke in the fall. Got their contact info, and the hospital for you.”

“Peabody.”

“I’ll take that information, Officer.”

He reeled it off without pulling out his notebook.

“Sweepers aren’t going to be happy about the state of the crime scene. People all the fuck over it, and the bodies’ve been moved around. Had a medical on the ice, and a vet—an animal doc—and they worked on the vics, and the injured.

“First vic took it in the back. That’s the female out there, in red.” He turned, gestured with a lift of that bulldog chin. “Wit statements aren’t clear about which got hit second, but you got two males, one gut shot, one between the fucking eyes. Looks like a laser strike to me, LT, but I don’t wanna tell you your job. And you’re going to hear from some of these wits about knives and suspicious individuals, and the usual crap.”

You didn’t make lieutenant without wading through, and learning to cut through, the usual crap.

“All right. You got the doctors on tap?”

“Yeah. Got them inside the locker room, got another couple in there, too, who claim they were the first to reach one of the male vics. And the wife of one of the male vics. She’s firm he was the last hit, and I lean toward that.”

“Peabody, take them, and I’ll start on the bodies. I want the security discs, and I want them now.”

“They got them ready for you,” Fericke told her. “Ask for Spicher. He’s rink security, and not altogether a dickhead.”

“I’m on it.” Peabody headed off, careful to avoid the snow.

“Gonna want some grippers for your boots,” Fericke told Eve. “Pile of them up there. Hotshot murder cop face-planting on the ice wouldn’t inspire confidence.”

“Hold the line, Fericke.”

“It’s what we do.”

She walked around to the rink’s entrance, strapping on a pair of the toothy grips before opening her field kit and sealing her hands and boots.

“Hey! Hey! Are you in charge? Who’s in fucking charge?”

She glanced over, locking eyes with a red-faced man of about forty who was wearing a thick white sweater and black skin pants.

“I’m in charge.”

“You have no right to hold me! I have an appointment.”

“Mister . . .”

“Granger. Wayne Granger, and I know my rights!”

“Mr. Granger, do you see the three people lying on the rink?”

“Of course I see them.”

“Their rights trump yours.”

He shouted after her as she worked her way across the ice to the female victim, something about police states and lawsuits. Looking down at the girl in red—couldn’t have been more than twenty years old—Eve didn’t give him another thought.

Blood pooled under her, spreading more red on the ice. She lay on her side, and Eve could clearly see bloody marks where other skaters, and the medicals, had gone through.

Her eyes, a bright, summer blue already glazed with death, stared, and one hand lay, palm up, in her own blood.

No, Eve didn't give Granger and his appointment another thought.

She crouched down, opening her field kit, and did her job.

She didn't rise or turn when Peabody came out.

"Vic is Ellissa Wyman, age nineteen. Still lives with her parents and younger sister, Upper West. TOD, fifteen-fifteen. ME will determine COD, but I agree with Fericke. It looks like a laser strike."

"The doctors—both of them—agree. And the vet? He was an Army corpsman, so he's seen laser strikes. They didn't do more than look at her—she was obviously gone. One tried working on the gut shot, and the other examined the head shot—but they were all gone. So they focused on the injured."

Eve rose with a nod. "Security discs."

"Right here."

Eve plugged one of the discs into her own PPC, cued it to fifteen-fourteen, and focused first on the girl in red.

"She's good," Peabody commented. "Her form, I mean. She's building up some speed there, and—"

She broke off when the girl shot through the air, form gone, and collided with the young family.

Eve rewound it, backed up another minute, and now scanned the other skaters, the onlookers.

"People are giving her room," Eve murmured, "some are watching her. I don't see any weapons."

She let it play through, watched the second victim jerk back, eyes widening, knees buckling.

Ran it back, noted the time. Ran it forward.

"Less than six seconds between strikes."

People skated to the first vic and the family. Security came rushing out. And the couple skating—poorly—along the rail—slowed. The man glanced back. And the strike.

"Just over six seconds for the third. Three shots in roughly twelve seconds, three dead—center back, gut, forehead. That's not luck. And none of those strikes came from the rink or around it. Tell Fericke, when he's got all names and contacts, that anyone who has given a statement can go. Except for the medicals and the third vic's wife.

"Get a full statement from all three of them, and contact whoever the vic's wife wants. The female's cleared for bagging, tagging, and transpo to the morgue. And we need park security feeds."

"Which sector?"

“All of them.”

Leaving Peabody gaping, Eve crossed the ice to the second victim.

When she finished with the bodies, she went inside.

The two medicals sat together on a bench in a locker area, drinking coffee out of go-cups.

Eve nodded to the uniform, dismissing her, then sat on the bench across from them. “I’m Lieutenant Dallas. You’ve given statements to my partner, Detective Peabody.”

They both nodded, the one on the left—trim, close-shaven, mid-thirties—nodded. “Nothing we could do for the three who were killed. By the time we got to them, they were gone.”

“Doctor?”

“Sorry. Dr. Lansing. I thought, I honestly thought the girl—the girl in the red suit—had just taken a bad spill. And the little boy, he was screaming. I was right there, that is, right behind them when it happened. So I tried to get to him, first. I started to move the girl, to get to the little boy, and realized she wasn’t hurt or unconscious. I heard Matt shouting for everyone to get off the ice, to get clear.”

“Matt.”

“That’s me. Matt Brolin. I saw the collision—saw that girl go into her turn for a jump, saw her propelled forward into the family. I was going to go help, then I saw the guy go down, saw him drop. Even then I didn’t put it together. But I saw the third one, I saw the strike, and I knew. I was a corpsman. Twenty-six years ago, but it doesn’t leave you. We were under attack, and I wanted people to get to cover.”

“You two know each other.”

“We do now,” Brolin said. “I knew the third guy was gone—hell of a sniper strike—but I tried to do what I could for the second one. He was still alive, Lieutenant. He looked at me. I remembered that look—and it’s a hard one to remember. He wasn’t going to make it, but you’ve got to do what you can do.”

“He shielded the guy with his own body,” Lansing put in. “People panicked, and I swear some would’ve skated right over that man, but Matt shielded him.”

“Jack had his hands full with the little boy, and the parents got banged around some, too. Right?”

“They didn’t have time to break their own fall,” Lansing explained. “The father’s got a mild concussion, the mother’s a sprained wrist. They’ll be all right. The boy, too, but he got the worst of it. Security had a first aid kit. I gave him a little something for the pain. The MTs were here inside of two minutes. You have to give them credit. I went to help Matt. And we had to try on the last one. But like Matt said, he was gone. Gone before he hit the ice.”

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