

intellectual property group

Title:	Firewall	Submitted to:	
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Format:	Novel/Manuscript	Analyst:	Veronica Carr
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Setting/Time:	Seattle, New York, San Francisco, Alberta, Rome/Present		
Genre:	Mystery/Thriller	Recommendation:	CONSIDER

Logline:

When a scientist at the world's premier AI company is murdered, a secret CIA operative must enlist a former love interest to help find the killer.

Rating Box:

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>
<u>Premise</u>	X			
<u>Characterization</u>		X		
<u>Plot</u>	X			
<u>Writing Ability</u>		X		



SYNOPSIS:

Colt McShane attends a tech conference with his co-worker, both of whom work for a New York investment bank. They're at the conference to evaluate companies that are attending, network, and scope out potential new clients. However, Colt has a secret mission that his co-worker knows nothing about. Colt tries to escape the keynote speech made by Pax AI CEO Jeff Kim, due to the fact that he can't be late for his meeting with his agent, but his co-worker convinces him to stay. At the end of the speech, Colt leaves in a hurry to meet with Marisha Stepanova, a senior lieutenant of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, at his hotel. He goes to a bar and motions to a bartender that his wife put her drink tab on the wrong room – a tactic to know Marisha's location. They meet through the windows of their respective hotel rooms, and we find out that the Russians were attempting to develop penetrations inside AI companies. Pax AI was their main target, and they're focused on top scientist Kozlov. Kozlov was blackmailed into being an agent, and is helping to plant SVR malware on the Pax AI network. Marisha is his handler.

Ed Wilcox, Colt's handler, tells Colt about an operation to turn Kozlov into a double agent. Both men are nervous about this, but they move forward. Russia has uncovered another organization's attempts to harm Pax AI, and the CIA needs to figure out who it is. However, that same night a sniper shoots and kills Kozlov in his hotel room. Colt rushes back to his own hotel to warn Marisha, but stops at the bar in case anyone is waiting on him. He alerts Marisha. While waiting, he sees Ava Klein, an ex-girlfriend of his. They make small talk, but he is in a hurry. He meets with Marisha, who tells him that she's going dark for the moment and not to contact her. He contacts Wilcox, who tells him to get back to New York. While booking his flight, Colt sees a news story that states that the conspiracy group Trinity claimed responsibility for the murder of Kozlov.

Back in New York and a week later, Colt meets with Wilcox and FBI agent Rinaldi to talk about further steps. Colt's new assignment is to infiltrate the Pax AI executive circle and find the mole, using his relationship with Ava Klein. Colt is apprehensive, but it is made clear that he doesn't really have a choice. We are transported to 10 years prior, in Israel. There, a young Colt meets a young Ava and they fall in love while Colt's Navy ship is docked. Their relationship ends abruptly when a terrorist attack makes Colt have to leave earlier than expected. Soon after, Colt resigns from the Navy and his friend Mick refers him to Ed Wilcox for a new job – one with the CIA.

Back in the present, Colt meets with Wilcox, Rinaldi, Jennifer Sims, and Chloe Weng in San Francisco to be briefed on his mission. They need to answer three questions – who is the mole inside Pax AI, and who are they working for? Who killed Kozlov? What did Kozlov see that was



so important he had to be killed? Weng later takes Colt into Chinatown, catching him up on Chinese intelligence in San Francisco and other operations currently going on. While on their way back, Colt believes that he saw Marisha in the park.

As Colt gets to know the employees more and more, he reports back to the team on his findings. One day, while out with Nader and Pace, Marisha slips Colt a phone to contact her with. Wilcox is nervous about this, but Rinaldi makes sure that they keep surveilling heavily. Colt is later invited to Jeff Kim's birthday party, where he encounters a drunk Pace and a beautiful Ava Klein. When about to leave with Ava, Pace tells Colt that Kozlov was actually killed at the Facility, a top secret place only a handful of Pax AI employees are allowed to go. Colt is stunned, but later gets into a car with Ava and leaves the party.

While out on the town with Ava, Colt gets a message from Weng. She tells him that Marisha wants to meet him. Colt wishes he could stay the night with Ava, but they eventually part. The next day, Jeff Kim and Ava meet to discuss the company. Kim is aware that Trinity has claimed responsibility for stealing their weather prediction algorithm, but tells Ava that instead of telling the government they will solve it within the company. Ava is hesitant but later agrees and vouches for Colt to get fourth floor access to the company.

The device Colt is given to use on the fourth floor doesn't get what he needs. Later, at a business trip in Canada, Jeff Kim reveals the language-prediction algorithm in front of a crowd at a small convention. That night, Colt and Ava go to dinner with Ava's Aunt Samantha where Colt begins to work on getting Ava to spy on her co-workers. She declines, but promises to get them both into The Facility. In San Francisco, Weng meets Marisha and finds out that the SVR is planning on buying Pax AI's language prediction algorithm, and the seller is Trinity. We later find out that the Chinese Intelligence Agency is surveilling Weng, and were able to access the same information that she got from Marisha. They want to track down Marisha and identify her so that the SVR will help them.

Colt, Ava, Pace and Jeff Kim visit The Facility, where Colt and Ava stumble upon an algorithm that is designed to change the opinion of users. Shaken and freaked out, Ava tells Colt that she will meet with Wilcox. At the meeting, she is given heels to take to the fourth floor and activate to get information. Colt goes to meet with Marisha, but notices the shooters who killed Kozlov following him. He and Marisha decide that she has been compromised and that it's time for her to come in, but it is too late. A gun is activated once it scans Marisha's face and kills her. Looking at her body, Colt sees the name of the mole—Ava Klein. Wilcox calls Colt from the car and tells him that Ava lost the tail of two FBI agents and that they believe she is Israeli intelligence.

Later that day, just as the Pax AI presentation is about to start, Ava gets information that she



needs to abort. She gets out of the building and signals for Colt to follow. The counterintelligence team tries to catch her, but to no avail. In the Pax AI building, three masked men shoot and kill the receptionist, security guard, and Nader. They break into the fourth floor and steal Pax AI data. At the FBI San Francisco field office, Kim learns that Colt is working with the government and expresses his hurt over Ava's betrayal. Colt later gets a text from Trinity, telling prospective buyers of Pax AI data to travel to Rome, Italy for the buy.

At the hotel in Italy, Colt meets Liu, the Chinese intelligence officer who tells him that Kozlov died in The Facility, not the hotel. He also tells Colt that Wilcox is working with the Russians, and that he shouldn't trust anyone above him. Colt heads to the train station and on the train he sees Ava. She tells him that he can trust her, and told him what happened ten years ago in Israel. Her parents had been killed in a terrorist attack, and her father was targeted because he was an Israeli intelligence officer. Her Aunt Samantha informed her of this, and convinced her to sign up to do the same work. She would train for Mossad (Israeli intelligence) for two years, so she wasn't able to contact Colt.

When they arrive to the sale, Jeff Kim appears on a screen telling the countries' representatives that he is working with Trinity and that he wants to sell them this technology to share and use for good. Colt calls Wilcox to ask if the US is buying and Wilcox says yes. Ava and her Aunt Samantha tell him that there is a possibility that it wasn't really Jeff Kim on the screen, but a deepfake video or that Jeff Kim is being held captive. They also tell him that Wilcox is probably working with the Russians. Soon after, a chemical attack killing multiple occurs right outside of the meeting place. Colt and Ava are sheltered by Aunt Samantha, who now says she has confirmation that Wilcox is working with the Russians. Colt's face is on the news; someone is framing him for the chemical attack. Wilcox wants to meet Colt, but Colt tells him to meet in public. Colt calls Weng and deduces that there's a likely chance Wilcox is meeting with the Russians, but wants to meet him alone. When Colt sees Wilcox he is with two agents and Jeff Kim.

Weng informs Sims of Wilcox's treachery, and calls Rinaldi to inform him as well. While looking at the video footage of Kozlov's murder, Weng notices that he was dead before he was shot. We discover that Rinaldi has been an informant for the Russians, and that they were behind Kozlov's murder and Marisha's demise. Back at the safe house, Rinaldi and his Russian colleagues kill Sims and then Weng, but not before she sends a text to Colt telling him about Rinaldi. At Colt and Wilcox's meeting, they both finally realize that neither one is the mole, but Rinaldi is. However, right before they are about to question Jeff Kim, gunshots begin. Russian mercenaries were hired by the SVR to kill Colt and Wilcox, and they were also the ones to commit the chemical attack. One agent dies, but the remaining ones are saved by Ava, Moshe, and Samantha.



On the jet, Jeff Kim tells them that Sheryl Hawkinson framed Trinity for committing the killing of Kozlov, but he was already dead for three days, and that he didn't know who killed him. They also decide that Colt, Moshe and Kim will go to The Facility and Ava will connect to them from the Pax AI fourth floor, as she is one of the only ones with that clearance. Pax AI is evacuating the facility because of a forest fire engineered by their enemies. Ava and Samantha head to The Facility, where Colt and Kim are being held at gunpoint. At The Facility, Moshe hides from the private security and tells them to not say anything. While sitting down at gunpoint, they see Rinaldi, Petrov, and his associate walking out of the building, but Pace is being held at gunpoint as well. Moshe shoots the guards keeping them captive, and set Colt and Kim Free. They get inside the building with Ava's security card and Kim's handprint, but Moshe gets shot, the forest fire is minutes away, and Petrov took their only way out.

They come face to face with Rinaldi, who eventually gives Pace back. Pace reveals he didn't really start the transmission of data, Rinaldi just thinks he did. Ava takes Pace back to the bunker where Moshe and Kim are. Colt convinces Rinaldi to go down to the bunker with them, and The Facility is decimated by the fire. Back at the Vancouver CIA office, Colt and Wilcox catch up. Weng's funeral is next week and the Israelis are working with the Americans. They try to figure out why Rinaldi would've turned, and stew over the fact that Sheryl Hawkinson isn't implicated in any of this. In San Francisco, we learn that Jeff Kim is an operative for the Chinese intelligence agency, and that he set up the meeting in Capri. Kim also killed Kozlov because Kozlov saw that he was stealing information, and reprogrammed the weather-prediction algorithm to say that the fire was farther than it was to Rinaldi.

COMMENTS:

FIREWALL is an action-packed and riveting spy thriller that dives into the world of technology and international espionage. The novel follows Colt McShane, former Navy officer who begins working for the CIA. His newest mission deals with the murder of a talented scientist from top AI company Pax AI. To find the killer, he must enlist his former love interest Ava Klein to help him. This novel has many twists and turns and is sure to keep your attention all the way through. Lovers of sci-fi and spy films will love this novel that's full of action, romance, and intense conflict. As the audience follows Colt into this world of murder and mystery, we realize that you can't trust anyone—especially in this line of work. With a couple of edits here and there, this novel would be great as a film or miniseries.

The protagonist, Colt McShane, is our typical hero. A Navy man through and through, he's loyal, honest, and would do anything to protect the people he's fighting for. Throughout the book we see his journey as an intelligence officer, and how it affects the person that he thought he was. Sometimes this book lends its view to other characters such as Ava Klein, Jeff Kim, and intelligence officers from other nations. This is not distracting, but in fact gives us more



background into the scope of the entire mission. Not only does this book contain multiple points of view, but it jumps back in time to give us more understanding about the present circumstance. It never feels like too much exposition, but it always ends up becoming necessary for the plot by the end.

The dialogue can be a bit clunky and verbose at times, but most of that is just because of the language used. Sometimes the story can get a bit confusing with the spy and engineer language. However, the author does a great job at explaining what's happening in this world. If optioned for film or television, it could easily be remedied through the scriptwriting and cinematography. The characters are clearly complex, and there's enough mystery to them for the audience to keep wanting more. No one is who they seem, which makes perfect sense in the world of international espionage. The pacing of the character development and story overall makes me believe that this would benefit from being optioned for a miniseries rather than a film. This would help the audience be more engaged in the world of this story, and there would be much better payoff for the story itself by the end.

The incorporation of the relationship between Colt and Ava does its job to humanize Colt and raise the stakes for him in this operation, but the relationship between them can seem a bit contrite at times. With a few edits, this could be remedied. The story is well supported by characters like Wilcox, Jeff Kim, and Weng, and the world has a truthfulness to it because of the author's experience with these topics. The idea of highlighting the connection between international espionage with the artificial intelligence race is genius and innovative, and has enough originality to compete in today's market. This is why FIREWALL is an overall CONSIDER.