



Qisas

A. A. Freda

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A couple faces down terrorists in this exciting, modern thriller.

In A. A. Freda's supercharged thriller *Qisas*, a daring couple fights terrorism in the US and beyond—and the fight is personal.

This entry in the Sam and James series begins with the couple divesting their money from a fashion company in order to invest in a railroad. They move to Texas and decide to attend the church run by Sam's father. Meanwhile, four Palestinian terrorists led by an Afghan warlord carry out their plan to kill 500 Texans; their target is the couple's new church. Though they do damage, James takes a gun from a parishioner and fires back. The Palestinians die, but the warlord flees the scene.

The event sets off a multinational series of acts of revenge. James turns his family's Colorado ranch into a formidable compound, but is unable to stop a kidnapping of Sam by the same terrorist group that tried to kill him and the congregation in Texas. He travels to Lebanon on a rescue mission to get back the love of his life, and he carries out an elaborate digital military operation to defeat the warlord and his followers.

Action drives the story, from the terror attack that opens the novel onward. Tension is constant; the fallout from the church shooting spirals in predictable and unpredictable ways. But despite all they're faced with, Sam and James remain steady, lovable, and honorable. Their relationship grounds every action and every decision in the book, especially after Sam's life is put in jeopardy.

James, a decorated Vietnam vet, is described as an everyday American hero. However, when his background is coupled with his wealth, he comes across as almost superhuman—a near impossible to kill vigilante. Though agnostic, he can deliver sermons; he fights back against well-trained terrorists with just a pistol; and he organizes paramilitary operations online, despite his retiree status and nominal disconnect from high technology. Sam is constructed in more realistic terms, as a smart and sophisticated woman who does not have the seemingly innate skills of an action movie hero. Both characters are given opportunities to show off their quirks and strengths, though James becomes larger than life after the novel's first hundred pages.

Told in plain English and with an emphasis on action, this is a gritty political thriller. Each chapter moves the narrative along, whether through shootings, an intelligence coup, or bits of derring-do by James. Still, the narrative ends on a predictable note, as chaos is placed under a semblance of order, and love wins out.

Qisas is a political thriller that takes on modern concerns, but whose heart and soul are more classic, as a story of good versus evil.

BENJAMIN WELTON (April 22, 2021)

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