

## The Blue Ring Assassin

**Keith K. Millheim**

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*With foci on retribution plots and spiritual developments, The Blue Ring Assassin is an emotional thriller.*

*The Blue Ring Assassin* is an exciting thriller about revenge, redemption, and soul searching.

Following a hit-and-run accident that leaves a man dead, an intoxicated and belligerent senator is pulled over for driving erratically. But the senator is acquitted. The victim's daughter, Zoe, spirals into an emotional abyss, drinking too much; she is almost assaulted. She begins to plot revenge against the senator.

Zoe's plot is helped by her area of expertise: she is a professor who specializes in the study of poisonous sea life. Hoping to make the senator suffer, she investigates him, learning his habits, including about his proclivities for illicit assignations with prostitutes. Zoe arranges for poisonous venom to be delivered to him during a tryst. Though her method of murder leaves nary a trace, a local detective, Saul, has his interest roused. He seeks advice from his rabbi—and then seeks Zoe's aid in a plot to rid the world of troublesome individuals.

Revenge is the book's persistent theme, even as the story grows and changes. Zoe feels compelled toward vengeance; this evolves from addressing the loss of her father toward avenging injustices committed by powerful people against powerless individuals. Her targets include a rich father and son who assault multiple women and the two police officers who killed her friend.

Though her actions are vengeful, Zoe is constructed as someone with a calm demeanor whose moves are calculated. She plots retribution with steely resolve. She's made multifaceted through her expressed love for her father and murdered friend, though her hatred toward those responsible, which allows for only one form of justice, dims this. An additional, spiritual element is introduced through the incorporation of dream trips guided by a spirit: they meet "The Great One" (a large crocodile), and later walk in on a compromising situation. Though the spiritual guide is a source of escapist humor in an otherwise dark story, the spiritual growth element he introduces is complicated by the story's simultaneous focus on Zoe seeking out potential murder weapons.

The story's development is gradual and varied. It includes scenes of Zoe taking out her targets, but also those that encompass background research and that show her blending into conversations. Zoe's charisma is emphasized as the internal battle for her soul takes over the story, though she switches between being portrayed as a remorseless killer and as a savior in waiting.

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PHILIP ZOZZARO (October 29, 2020)

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