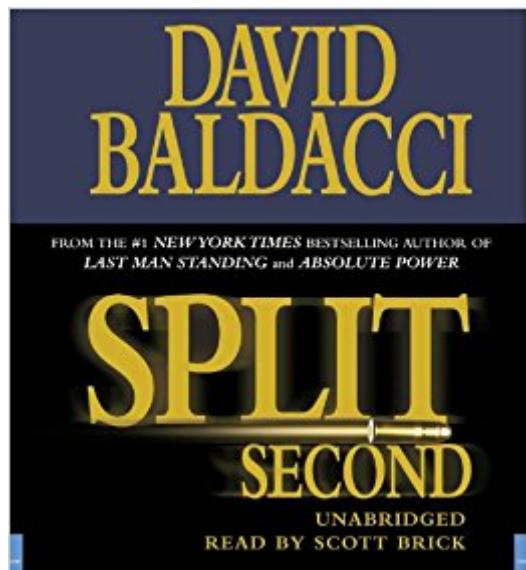


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# Split Second (King & Maxwell)



## **Synopsis**

Michelle Maxwell has just wrecked her promising career at the Secret Service. Against her instincts, she let a presidential candidate out of her sight for the briefest moment and the man whose safety was her responsibility vanished into thin air. Sean King knows how she feels. Eight years earlier, the hard-charging Secret Service agent allowed his attention to be diverted for a split second. And the candidate he was protecting was gunned down before his eyes. Now Michelle and Sean are about to see their destinies converge. Drawn into a maze of lies, secrets, and deadly coincidences, the two discredited agents uncover a shocking truth: that the separate acts of violence that shattered their lives were really a long time in the making-and are a long way from over...

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"We just solved a huge, complicated mystery," says one protagonist to another in this latest novel from the bestselling author of *Last Man Standing*, *Absolute Power*, etc. And that is the problem: this story of two disgraced Secret Service agents who come together to solve two campaign-trail crimes doesn't play to Baldacci's strengths, which are suspense and action (as well as strong characterizations; here's one thriller author who writes people that readers care about). The novel is primarily a mystery, with lots of talk and untangling of clues, and a less than gripping one at that. It begins in 1996, when Secret Service agent Sean King is distracted-by what isn't revealed until near the book's end-just when the presidential candidate he's guarding is shot dead. Eight years later, agent Michelle Maxwell lets the candidate she's watching enter a funeral parlor room alone; he's

kidnapped. Then a body appears in the office of King, who's now a successful lawyer in North Carolina. Maxwell sees King on TV and decides to look into the event that caused his disgrace, so similar to hers. Meanwhile, King's old flame, Joan Dillinger, an ex-agent whose security firm has been hired to find the kidnapped presidential candidate, hires King to help in the hunt. The narrative ties binding the characters don't loosen much over the novel's course, as curious cross-currents flow between the two cases, all leading to a cinematic but off-the-wall denouement that reveals a villain who is more cartoon than human. What saves this novel are a few strong but brief action sequences and, above all, the interplay among the principal characters, particularly the romantic tensions among King, Maxwell and Dillinger. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Baldacci's new thriller is sustained by the pulse-pounding suspense his fans have come to expect. Sean King is a former Secret Service agent whose career ended eight years ago when the political candidate he was protecting was assassinated. Now a lawyer, King has organized his life to forget his past, but it barges rudely in on him when he finds a colleague murdered in his office building. Further complicating his life are two women: Joan Dillinger, a former coworker and lover, and Michelle Maxwell, a Secret Service agent whose candidate, John Bruno, has just been kidnapped. Sean and Michelle start to suspect that their candidates' fates are connected and begin to investigate any ties the two may have to each other. It doesn't help that the police are on King's case, especially when yet another body turns up, this time in King's house. King and Maxwell turn their focus to Arnold Ramsey, the man who assassinated King's candidate, but it remains unclear if he was working alone. Meanwhile, the danger mounts, for neither King nor Maxwell can guess who the conspirators' next target is. Kristine Huntley Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Sean King and Michelle Maxwell are among my favorite fictional detectives and in "Split Second" author David Baldacci spins a tale about how they first met and, eventually, became partners with their own agency. It's an interesting story; one that details how a momentary distraction caused King to look away at the precise moment that an assassin shot the presidential candidate he was supposed to be protecting when he was a Secret Service agent. It also explains how Maxwell wound up suspended eight years later when a candidate she was protecting was kidnapped. That should make this a 5-star novel but Baldacci, in my opinion, doesn't quite make the villain and his henchmen very convincing. They are cartoonish more than menacing; cutouts rather than fully

realized characters with believable motives. Baldacci does try to explain the villain's reasons by saying he is insane but... well, that's just not really believable given the length of time that passes between the death of one candidate and the kidnapping of another. It is, in fact, not very believable when it comes to explaining the assassination. That said, Baldacci does a nice job fleshing out King and Maxwell, which makes this a 4-star story rather than a 2-star or 3-star novel. As a reader - or, in this case a listener - I enjoyed the interaction between the two protagonists. I also liked the way Baldacci painted both of them: King, more reserved, Maxwell, more action oriented. As I said, King and Maxwell are favorites of mine and I can only hope that in subsequent novels Baldacci brings readers fully realized villains with believable motives.

\*\*\*\* For pure entertainment and reading pleasure, this was great. It took two different incidents spread apart by 8 years involving Secret Service members who lost their protegee, and placed these two events together in a thrilling adventure that ended up joining the two ex-Secret Service agents into a new partnership of King and Maxwell, Private Investigators. These two ex-agents are good, and they have great chemistry between them. They complement each other's talents, brains, and energies, and will make for some great stories down the line with Baldacci. As always, Baldacci spins a yarn that has so many twists and turns that I changed suspects at least three times, and still didn't get it right. There are so many details that come together to solve these crimes that it is mind spinning. Good story.

I thought the story started out wonderfully, but then it became overly complicated when so many different characters got involved in hypothesizing about what might be happening and the motivations for all the murders. I guess some people would call all that hypothesizing to be "red herrings" but to me it was a little too much and overstated. And while I was willing to accept that the murderer was mentally imbalanced along the lines of the Phantom of the Opera, I found it a little bit too unbelievable that a U.S. Marshal had aided and abetted the murderer with seemingly no conscience and, in fact, had partly orchestrated the murderer's plan. The writing was good to excellent, the story moved forward at a nice pace, but I found the whole justification for the murderer's revenge a bit difficult to swallow, pushing the verisimilitude of the story past the boundaries which I usually find acceptable. The story also lost a few points when Sean King started keeping secrets from the reader, which was just author manipulation to build artificial tension. The writing rule of thumb which I wholeheartedly ascribed to is that "if the protagonist knows something, then the

reader should know it too, and at the exact same moment that the protagonist knows it. Having the protagonist keep secrets from the reader distanced me from the story and made me feel like I was being artificially manipulated by the writer. Not nice. I had hoped for more sexual tension between Sean King and Michelle Maxwell, but it never happened, and it appears their relationship is going to be platonic for the remainder of their partnership, which I think detracts from their relationship. And the whole "Thornton Jorst" versus "Trojan horse" was a huge stretch, coming out of left field. That Sean King was able to make that interpretation or connection was totally unbelievable to me. Jane Marple could never have done that, and neither could have Hercule Poirot. Definitely not a 4-star story, but also definitely not a 2-star story. Give it a read, but don't expect to have your socks blown off.

While I generally like Baldacci's work...mostly the plots, the King and Maxwell's adventures it always seem to lack believable dialog. They tend to sound like there is a lack of chemistry between them and end up sounding like they are trying to force it. I just don't feel any sexual tension between them...and perhaps that is his intent. But the net effect is that both characters lack an element of genuineness...a bit wooden...

Exciting, can't-put-it-down book. David Baldacci is one of my all-time favorite authors. I've read all six of the Maxwell and King series books, of which *Split Second* is the first. If you want an exciting book to read, buy this one!!

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