

*Final Target*  
Iris Johansen, 2001  
Bantam, 340 pgs

Review by David Eaton Mauk

If most readers share an affection for the finely drawn characters and intricate plots of her last three books culminating with *The Search*, I believe they will be disappointed in Iris Johansen's, *Final Target*. It is a mish-mash of feather-weight characters cast in a poorly scripted, television movie of the week.

Unfortunately we've left Eve Duncan, Sarah Patrick, John Logan and Monty behind. In their stead we have international bandit Michael Travis, sisters Melissa and Jessica Riley, and Cassie, the first daughter of the U. S. President. It only gets more convoluted and far-fetched from there. The book opens with a bloody attack at an estate in France where the President's daughter is the presumed target, in which Cassie's long-time nanny betrays her to the evil man whose trail we follow for the remainder of the novel.

Cassie goes into a catatonic state, with Dr. Jessica Riley faithfully at her bedside during nightly screaming attacks. It turns out Melissa experienced this condition for a period of six years too, after experiencing the automobile death of their parents. Despite the length of this recovery, the sisters constantly tell us that it's taking much too long with Cassie, even though it's only been months by comparison. This type of contradiction exist throughout the book and for me erodes the creditability of the story-line. I always had the same problem with Robert Ludlum stretching coincidence and believability a bit too far, and it didn't seem to slow down his readership, so doubting this reviewer is fair game.

Travis, as he is called throughout *Final Target*, is of course the angst-filled object of the women's desire, though we have to wait until nearly the final scene before finding out if one of the sister's ends up with the hero. And a hero Travis is! He pops up at all the right times, and has an inside track both on matters of national security and international intrigue. The President is also called by his last name, and acts like a bully in nearly each of his scenes.

The routine flaws of the characters aside, each seems wooden, never quite acting consistently, except in expressing their well-developed tempers. It feels like a long family feud episode, right from the moment they all meet each other.

A more interesting aspect of the novel, and one that Johansen has played with previously, is the idea of telepathic communication between people who are psychically connected. Melissa and Cassie share this phenomena, with a surprise revelation at the book's conclusion that helps explain Travis' sudden appearances. The author tells us through her characters how weird this sounds, but it's an interesting tangent to an otherwise forgettable book. Let's hope Johansen realizes she has a good thing going in her *Search* series and brings back Eve, Sarah, and Monty the golden retriever before embarking on another misadventure.