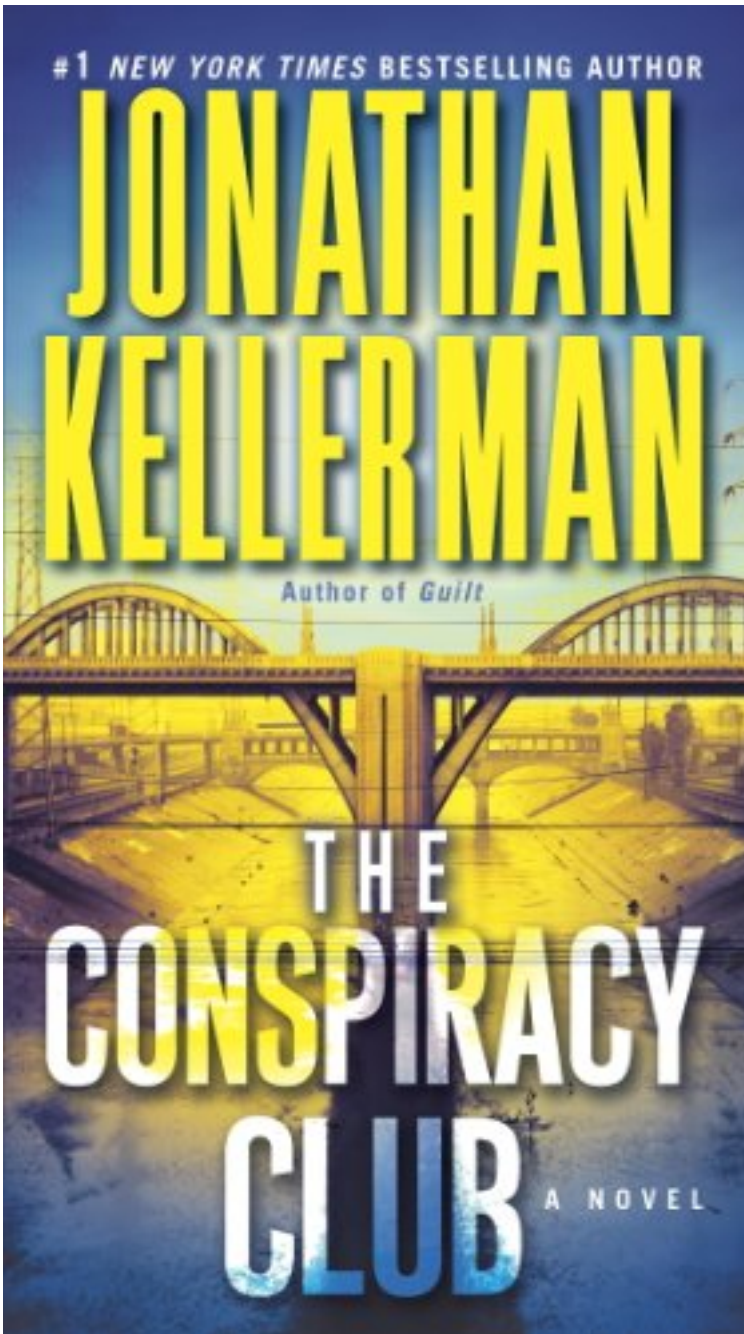


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The Conspiracy Club: A Novel



*Par Jonathan Kellerman
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Description : Description du produitOver the course of twenty acclaimed novels of suspense, most recently The Murder Book and A Cold Heart, New York Times bestselling author Jonathan Kellerman has pitted psychologist Dr. Alex Delaware against adversaries as disturbed and dangerous as Delaware is clever and compassionate. Now in Kellermans gripping new novel, a different hero will hold the reader spellbound: a dedicated young psychologist, unschooled in the ways of violent crime and incalculable eviluntil his life is

irreversibly touched by both . . . and he is thrust into a chilling hunt for a twenty-first-century Jack the Ripper. When his brief, passionate romance with nurse Jocelyn Banks is cut short by her kidnapping and brutal murder, Dr. Jeremy Carrier is left emotionally devastated, haunted by his lover's grisly demise and warily eyed by police still seeking a prime suspect in the unsolved slaying. To escape the pain, he buries himself in his work as staff psychologist at City Central Hospital only to be drawn deeper into a waking nightmare when more women turn up murdered in the same gruesome fashion as Jocelyn Banks . . . and the suspicion surrounding Jeremy intensifies. Now, the only way to prove his innocence and put his torment to rest is to follow the trail of a cunning psychopath. Spurring on Jeremy's investigation is Dr. Arthur Chess, an enigmatic pathologist who specializes in examining the dead, but harbors a keen fascination with the darker deeds committed by the living. Arthur draws Jeremy into an unexpected friendship, and into the confidence of a cryptic society devoted to matters unknown and unspoken. When he suddenly slips away, Jeremy is left to contend with an onslaught of anonymous clues and the growing realization that a harrowing game of cat and mouse has been set in motion. But who besides Jeremy is playing and who is making the rules? Before the killer strikes again, Jeremy races to connect the disturbing puzzle pieces being fed to him. Yet his search for answers only seems to yield more questions. And deepening the mystery is the undeniable presence of someone watching it all and guiding Jeremy's investigation from behind the scenes. As the game intensifies, Jeremy must decide if a secret ally is setting him on the right path . . . or a sadistic enemy is setting him up for a fate far beyond even the most twisted imagination. From the Hardcover edition.

Presentation de l'auteur NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER When his passionate romance with nurse Jocelyn Banks is cut short by her kidnapping and brutal murder, young psychologist Jeremy Carrier is left emotionally devastated, haunted by his lover's grisly demise and eyed warily by police still seeking a prime suspect in the slaying. An unnerving, highly cinematic plot . . . [Kellerman has] headed off into different terrain . . . with striking success in this . . . quick-witted outing. Janet Maslin, *The New York Times* To escape the pain, he buries himself in his work at City Central Hospital only to be drawn deeper into a walking nightmare when more women are murdered in the same gruesome fashion as Jocelyn. As the suspicion surrounding Jeremy intensifies, the only way for him to prove his innocence and put his torment to rest is to follow the deadly trail of a modern-day Jack the Ripper. BONUS: This edition includes an excerpt from Jonathan Kellerman's *Guilt*. Extrait | Raging emotions, dead tissue. Polar opposites was the way Jeremy Carrier had always seen it. In a hospital setting, no two disciplines were less connected than psychology and pathology. As a practitioner of the former, Jeremy prided himself on an open mind; a good psychotherapist worked hard at avoiding stereotypes. But during all his years of training and clinical work at City Central Hospital, Jeremy had met few pathologists who didn't fit a mold: withdrawn, mumbly types, more comfortable with gobbets of necrosed flesh, the abstract expressionism of cell smears, and the cold-storage ambience of the basement morgue, than with living, breathing patients. And his fellow psychologists, psychiatrists, and all the other soldiers of the mental health army, were, more often than not, overly delicate souls repelled by the sight of blood. Not that Jeremy had actually known any pathologists, even after a decade of passing them in the hallways. The social structure of the hospital had regressed to high school sensibilities: Us-Them as religion, a lusty proliferation of castes, cliques, and cabals, endless jockeying for power and turf. Adding to that was the end-means inversion that captures every bureaucracy: the hospital had devolved from a healing place needing funds to treat patients to a large-scale municipal employer requiring patient fees to meet its staff payroll. All that created a certain asocial flavor. A confederacy of isolates. At City Central, like was attracted to like, and only the last-ditch necessities of patient care led to cross-pollination: internists finally admitting defeat and calling in surgeons, generalists taking deep breaths before plunging into the morass of consultation. What reason could there be for a pathologist to contact a psychologist? Because of all that and because life's hellish wrist-flick had turned Jeremy Carrier into a tormented, distracted young man he was caught off-balance by Arthur Chess's overture. Perhaps Jeremy's distractibility formed the basis for all that followed. For nearly a year, Jeremy had seen Arthur once a week, but the two men had never exchanged a word. Yet here was Arthur, settling down opposite Jeremy in the doctors' dining room and asking if Jeremy cared for company. It was just before 3 p.m., an off-hour for lunch, and the room was nearly empty. Jeremy said, Sure, then realized he was anything but. Arthur nodded and settled his big frame into a small chair. His tray bore two helpings of fried chicken, a hillock of mashed potatoes glazed with gravy, a perfect square of corn bread, a small bowl of succotash, and a sweating can of Coca-Cola. Staring at the food, Jeremy wondered: Southern roots? He tried to recall if Arthur's voice had ever

betrayed Southern inflections, didnt think so. If anything, the old mans baritone was flavored by New England. Arthur Chess showed no immediate interest in conversation. Spreading a napkin on his lap, he began shearing through the first piece of chicken. He cut quickly and gracefully, using long fingers tipped by broad nails stubbed short. His long white lab coat was snowy-clean but for a disturbing spatter of pinkish stains on the right sleeve. The shirt beneath the coat was a blue pinpoint Oxford spread-collar. Arthurs magenta bow tie hung askew in a way that suggested intention. Jeremy figured the pathologist for at least sixty-five, maybe older, but Arthurs pink skin glowed with health. A neat, white, mustachless beard, which gave insight into what Lincolns wouldve looked like had Honest Abe been allowed to grow old, fringed Arthurs long face. His bald head was lunar and imposing under cruel hospital lighting. Jeremy knew of Arthurs reputation the way one is aware of a strangers biography. Once Head of Pathology, Professor Chess had stepped down from administrative duties a few years ago to concentrate on scholarship. Something to do with soft-tissue sarcomas, the minutiae of cell-wall permeability, or whatnot. Arthur also had a reputation as a world traveler and an amateur lepidopterist. His treatise on the carrion-eating butterflies of Australia had been featured in the hospital gift shop, alongside the usual paperback diversions. Jeremy had noticed the single stack of dry-looking, dirt brown volumes because they drabbed in comparison with the jackets of lurid best-sellers. The brown stack never seemed to reduce; why would a patient want to read about bugs that ate corpses? Arthur ate three bites of chicken and put down his fork. I really do hope this isnt an intrusion, Dr. Carrier. Not at all, Dr. Chess. Is there something you need? Need? Arthur was amused. No, just seeking a bit of social discourse. Ive noticed that you tend to dine alone. My schedule, lied Jeremy. Unpredictable. Since his life had gone to hell, hed been avoiding social discourse with anyone but patients. Hed gotten to the point where he could fake friendly. But sometimes, on the darkest of days, any human contact was painful. Lifes little wrist-flick . . . Of course, said Chess. Given the nature of your work, that would have to be the case. Sir? said Jeremy. The unpredictability of human emotions. Thats true. Arthur nodded gravely, as if the two of them had reached a momentous agreement. A moment later, he said, Jeremymay I call you Jeremy? Jeremy, I noticed you werent at our little Tuesday get-together this week. A situation came up, said Jeremy, feeling like a child caught playing hookey. He forced a smile. Unpredictable emotions. Something that resolved well, I hope? Jeremy nodded. Anything new come up at T.B.? Two new diagnoses, an adenosarcoma, and a CML. Typical presentations, the usual spirited discussion. To be honest, you didnt miss a thing. Our little Tuesday get-together was Tumor Board. A weekly ritual, 8 to 9 a.m., in the larger conference room, Arthur Chess presiding over a confab of oncologists, radiotherapists, surgeons, nurse specialists. Commanding the slide projector, wielding a light wand, and his voluminous memory. For nearly a year, Jeremy had been the mental health armys representative. In all that time, hed spoken up once. Hed attended his first Tumor Board years before, as an intern, finding the experience an ironic grotesquerie: slides of tumor-ravaged cells click-clicked on a giant screen, the images obscured by nicotine haze. At least a third of the cancer doctors and nurses were puffing away. Jeremys supervisor at the time, an astonishingly pompous psychoanalyst, had wielded a Meerscham pipe of Freudian proportions and blown Latakia fumes in Jeremys face. Arthur had been running things back then, too, and hed looked much the same, Jeremy realized. The chief pathologist hadnt smoked, but neither had he objected. A few months later, a wealthy benefactor touring the hospital poked her head in and gasped. Soon after, the hospital passed a no-smoking rule, and the mood at subsequent Tumor Boards grew testy. Arthur sectioned a tiny square of corn bread from the host slab and chewed thoughtfully. No loss for you, Jeremy, but I do believe that your presence contributes. Really. Even if you dont say much, the fact that youre there keeps the rest of us on our toes. Sensitivity-wise. Well, said Jeremy, wondering why the old man was bullshitting him so shamelessly, anything that helps sensitivity. The time you did speak up, said Arthur, taught us all a lesson. Jeremy felt his face go hot. I felt it was relevant. Oh, it was, Jeremy. Not everyone saw it that way, but it was. The time he spoke up had been six weeks ago. Arthur flashing slides of a metastasized stomach carcinoma on the big screen, defining the tumors in the precise Latin poetry of histology. The patient, a fifty-eight-year-old woman named Anna Duran, had been referred to Jeremy because of unresponsive demeanor. Jeremy found her initially sullen. Rather than try to draw her out, he refilled her empty cup with tea, got himself coffee, plumped her pillows, then sat down by her bedside and waited. Not caring much if she responded, or not. It had been that way since Jocelyn. He didnt even try anymore. And the funny thing was, patients reacted to his apathy by opening up more quickly. Grief had made him a more effective therapist. Jeremy, flabbergasted, gave the matter some thought and decided patients probably perceived his blank face and statue posture as some sort of immutable, Zen-like calm. If only they knew . . . By the time she finished her tea, Anna Duran was ready to talk. Which is why Jeremy was

forced to speak up, twenty minutes into a contentious exchange between Mrs. Durans attending oncologist and the treating radiotherapist. Both specialists were voluble men, well-intentioned, dedicated to their craft, but overly focused, baby-bathwater-tossers. Complicating matters further, neither cared for the other. That morning theyd slipped into an increasingly heated debate on treatment sequence that left the rest of the attendees peeking at their watches. Jeremy had resolved to stay out of it. Tuesday mornings were an annoyance, his turn the result of a mandatory rotation that placed him in too-close proximity to death. But that morning, something propelled him to his feet. The sudden motion fixed fifty pairs of eyes upon him. The oncologist had just completed a pronouncement. The radiotherapist, about to embark on a response, was deterred by the look on Jeremys face. Arthur Chess rolled the light wand between his hands. Yes, Dr. Carrier? Jeremy faced the sparring physicians. Gentlemen, your debate may be justified on medical grounds, but youre wasting your time. Mrs. Duran wont agree to any form of treatment. From Publishers Weekly Kellerman re-invigorates a number of tried-and-true mystery conventions in this gripping, intricately plotted, non-Alex Delaware stand-alone novel of psychological suspense. A psychologist at City Central Hospital, Jeremy Carrier, is attempting to put his life back together after the brutal murder of his girlfriend, Jocelyn, when he is approached by elderly Dr. Arthur Chess with an offer of friendship. Jeremy, still too traumatized by Jocelyn's death to attempt even the most casual of relationships, initially rejects Chess's solicitation. After further conversation, he accepts an invitation to an elegant dinner at a very private club with Chess and five other older men and women of high intellectual and social rank, all of whom have an extreme interest in crime and the nature of evil. Just as a halting, tentative rapport with fellow doctor Angela Rios begins to develop, Jeremy receives the first in a series of mysterious, anonymous messages. By piecing these messages together with other clues from Dr. Chess, he comes to understand that someone is trying to point him toward the killer of his beloved Jocelyn and a number of other local women. Kellerman is a master at building character and slowly unfolding events, divulging just the right amount of information. Jeremy uncovers more murders, both past and present, and eventually realizes he's had everything wrong from the very beginning. Savvy mystery readers will not be surprised that the likable Jeremy finally comes to the correct conclusions and identifies the killer, earns the respect of his elderly friends and the love of his new lady. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.