Former CIA officer Alex Matthews finds himself caught in a dangerous investigation where politics and crime are two sides of the same coin, in the latest espionage thriller by Paul Vidich.

Washington, DC. It's the month before the presidential election, with polls showing a dead heat, and former CIA Moscow Station Chief Alex Matthews has been brought into the White House by an old friend to help with the reelection effort. The question is why? The president doesn't like him, and he doesn't fit on the White House team of hard-charging idealogues. In time, it becomes clear to Matthews that he's been recruited for his Russian connections: Mikhail Sorkin, his former Moscow lawyer who is close to the Kremlin, and his last remaining Russian asset, code-named LAMB, who warned of Russian interference in the previous presidential election.

Matthews keeps his head down and tries to not get involved in the vicious infighting of a polarized country, but events begin to spiral out of his control at a Republican fundraiser. He spots Irina, a woman he is dating, get in the hotel elevator with a senior White House colleague and a second woman. Seeing that Irina is upset, he follows them to a fifth-floor suite where he overhears a violent confrontation. He leaves, but outside he comes upon bystanders crowded around a woman's naked body, dead on the sidewalk. It's the woman who was with Irina; she has fallen or been pushed from a hotel window.

Speculation circulates that the dead woman worked on the campaign but reported to Moscow. With the ensuing PR storm threatening the reelection efforts, the deputy chief of staff enlists Matthews to locate two suspects seen in hotel surveillance video before the police do—Irina and a fleeing man. Matthews recognizes himself in the video and turns from witness to suspect—from hunter to hunted. The investigation is a dangerous maze where politics and crime are two sides of the same coin. The trick, he knows, is to stay one step ahead. But what if the enemy has been waiting for him all along?

A timely, gripping political thriller by an acclaimed master of the genre.

Praise for *The Poet's Game*:

"Vidich proves himself yet again one of the leading practitioners of spy fiction at work today. As ever, there's a veil of sophistication thrown over the violent implications of the game unfolding between Vidich's rival agents, creating an atmosphere of restraint and intellect reminiscent of the great Le Carré. Vidich has outdone himself with a spy thriller at once utterly cerebral and undeniably compelling."
—*CrimeReads*, a Top Five Espionage Novel of the Year

"Vidich's impressive body of work has moved between Beirut, Berlin, Cuba, and Moscow, where he returns in one of his best books yet. Alex Matthews, former Moscow station chief, has left the CIA and rebuilt his life after losing his wife and daughter. The final twist is shocking."
—*The Financial Times*, Best Thrillers of 2025

"A fast-paced, engrossing tale of the danger, doubt and double-dealing that come with the secret life."
—Tom Nolan, *The Wall Street Journal*

PAUL VIDICH is the acclaimed author of *The Poet's Game*, *Beirut Station*, *The Matchmaker*, *The Mercenary*, *The Coldest Warrior*, *An Honorable Man*, and *The Good Assassin*. He lives in New York.

THE SHEPHERD

PAUL VIDICH

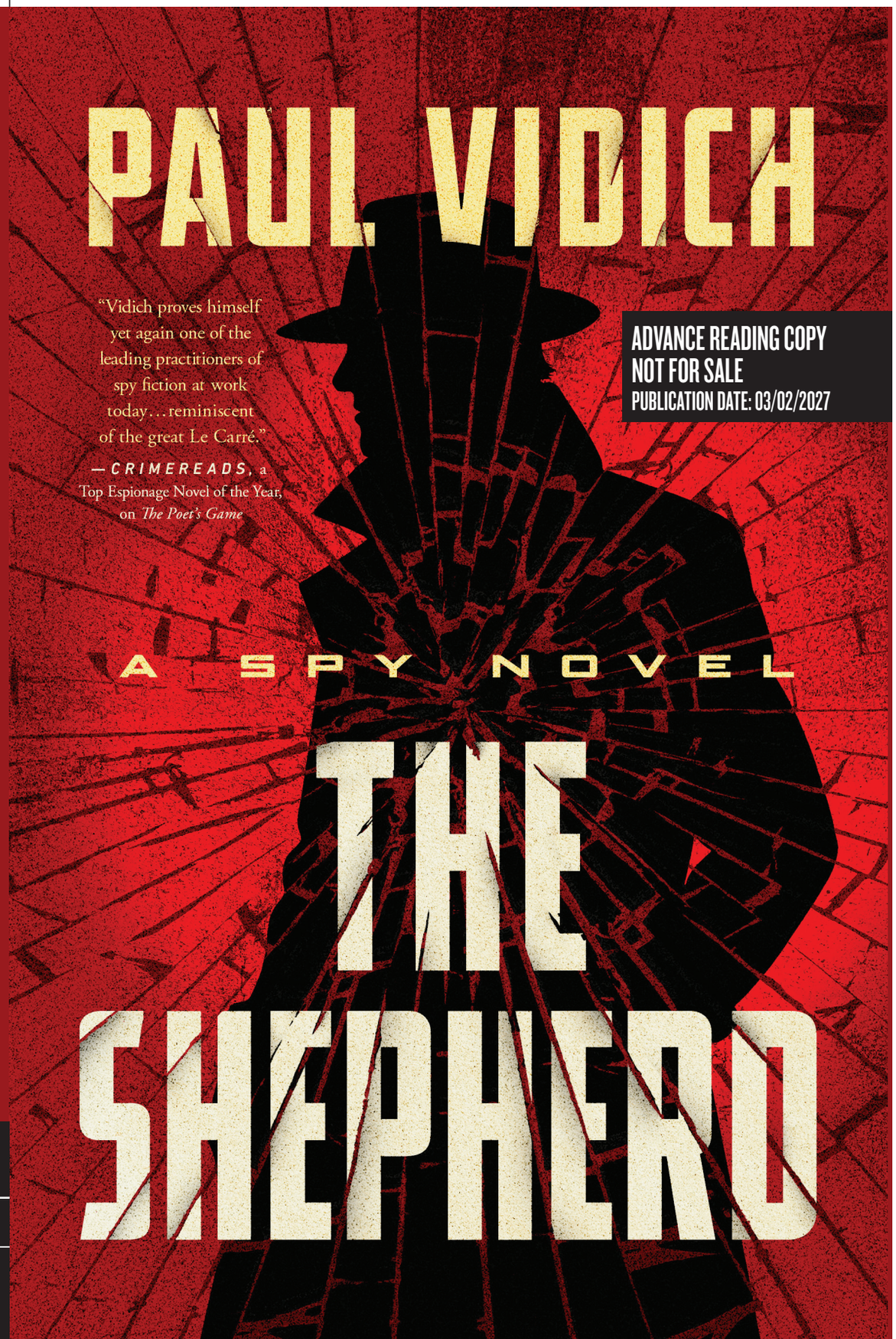
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