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On February 14, 1989, Valentine's Day, Salman Rushdie was telephoned by a BBC journalist and told that he had been "sentenced to death" by the Ayatollah Khomeini. For the first time he heard the word fatwa. His crime? To have written a novel called *The Satanic Verses*, which was accused of being "against Islam, the Prophet and the Quran."

So begins the extraordinary story of how a writer was forced underground, moving from house to house, with the constant presence of an armed police protection team. He was asked to choose an alias that the police could call him by. He thought of writers he loved and combinations of their names; then it came to him: Conrad and Chekhov_Joseph Anton.

How do a writer and his family live with the threat of murder for more than nine years? How does he go on working? How does he fall in and out of love? How does despair shape his thoughts and actions, how and why does he stumble, how does he learn to fight back? In this remarkable memoir Rushdie tells that story for the first time; the story of one of the crucial battles, in our time, for freedom of speech. He talks about the sometimes grim, sometimes comic realities of living with armed policemen, and of the close bonds he formed with his protectors; of his struggle for support and understanding from governments, intelligence chiefs, publishers, journalists, and fellow writers; and of how he regained his freedom.

It is a book of exceptional frankness and honesty, compelling, provocative, moving, and of vital importance. Because what happened to Salman Rushdie was the first act of a drama that is still unfolding somewhere in the world every day.

"A harrowing, deeply felt and revealing document: an autobiographical mirror of the big, philosophical preoccupations that have animated Mr. Rushdie's work throughout his career."_Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

"Thoughtful and astute . . . This is an important book not only because of what it has to say about

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a man of principle who, under the threat of violence and death, stood firm for freedom of speech and freedom of religion, but also because of its implications about our times and fanatical religious intolerance in a frighteningly fragile world."_USA Today (4 out of 4 stars)