**Synopsis of Backlash by Ian Coates (a thriller)**

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Trish McGowan is being blackmailed—not for her money, but to force her to participate in other blackmails. She is made to pass demands from the mysterious ‘Argus’ to his other targets, protecting him from victims who might retaliate.

McGowan narrowly survives a bomb attack after sending a blackmail threat to illegal arms dealer Kurt Wendell. When a friend is then mistaken for her and murdered, McGowan runs for her life. She realises the only way to stay alive is to find Argus and persuade him to protect her from Wendell. But trying to find someone who wants to remain anonymous isn’t easy. McGowan camps at the derelict mansion where she has previously deposited money collected from victims, hoping Argus will visit.

Meanwhile, Matt Casey, an electronics technician at a military drone manufacturer, and another of Argus’ victims, is forced to pass blackmail threats to his CEO, Art Bradon.

Bradon hires ex-SAS operative Craig Tyler to recover the childhood diary he is being blackmailed about. When Casey collects the payment, Tyler tails him, fighting off thugs sent to stop him. To Tyler (and the reader!), it looks as if Casey is Argus. McGowan, Casey, and Tyler clash when Casey leaves the money at the old mansion.

The three form an uneasy alliance against Argus. They find Argus’ mistress’ house, and mistakenly conclude this woman is the blackmailer. Thinking they now know Argus’ true identity, McGowan plans to pass those details to Wendell and explain this is the person he should be targeting, not her. Wendell’s suggestion to meet is a trap, and McGowan and Casey are nearly shot and drowned before surviving a car chase and Wendell’s shotgun-toting accomplice.

Casey returns to work and attends MOD trials of his company’s drone. At the hotel being used, he hears a voice he recognises from an answer-phone message they heard at Argus’ mistress’ house—it is Art Metcalf’s, who is Bradon’s cousin and director of rival company MSA. His presence is no coincidence, and Casey and McGowan realise he is involved and that it’s the cousins’ rivalry that fuels the blackmail.

Searching Metcalf’s room, McGowan discovers proof he is Argus and finds a warehouse rental agreement. Tyler violently forces Metcalf to reveal the diary’s hiding place and, although Metcalf escapes, Tyler recovers the book after tangling with assailants hired to protect it.

Casey visits the warehouse and discovers Metcalf and Wendell preparing MSA’s drone for illegal export. Casey has brought with him Bradon and MSA’s owner (Metcalf’s father), who tries to intervene to prevent the sale. A fight ensues; Metcalf tries to protect his father but is knocked unconscious. Casey and Bradon are found and tied-up, and Wendell burns the warehouse around them. Metcalf/Argus dies in the fire but McGowan rescues the others. MSA’s owner begs Bradon to help stop the illegal sale, and Casey uses their company’s drone to help MOD police find and arrest Wendell after a chase and gunfight.

Bradon and Metcalf’s father start to lay aside generations of family rivalry, and initiate talks about a joint-company venture.