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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ THRILLER

Black Cobra: Sequel to Three Days to Die

John Avery
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John Avery's *Black Cobra* is as pulse-pounding and high-octane as its predecessor.

The sequel to Avery's *Three Days to Die* opens as young Aaron and his single mom ride to safety after killing Johnny Souther, a thug who kidnapped the boy and his mother, a tale told in book one. After Johnny's younger brother, Jason, is involved in a car crash with Aaron's getaway car, killing Aaron's mother, Aaron makes his way to the Cayman Islands. Now fifteen, Aaron has a chance encounter with Jason and unaware that he is Johnny's brother they become involved in a Soviet general's plot to assassinate the American president on a submarine called *Black Cobra*.

Aaron's progression from a scared boy to a self-reliant youth is unclear as the story jumps abruptly from a scared Aaron at the crash site to a much more mature Aaron working in the Caymans, drinking, snorting cocaine and besotted with women. Because Aaron looks older than fifteen, the first time he meets Jason and his lady friend, Brandy, the twenty-seven-year-old Brandy continues to flirt with Aaron even after she learns he's a minor. He becomes enchanted with Brandy, and with the general's eighteen-year-old daughter, Katya, as well: "Her touch was soft and her skin smelled sweet and wonderful … hormones heated him to his core, burning away any fragments of resistance he once had, leaving him weak."

The author's meticulous research on the subs and their history shines, but the Soviet-submarine thread is not well integrated into the novel. The crazy anti-American commander, would be better suited to a book set shortly after the Cold War rather than in the present day.

That said, the audience will find plenty to enjoy. As with the previous installment, every chapter ends in a cliff-hanger, and the dialogue is realistic. When he first hears about the submarine scheme, Jason asks, "Why should I go all the way to San Diego to meet with some old sea-fart, when you can't even give me the slightest hint as to what you're up to?"

Despite his precociousness, Aaron still aches from losing his mother. Jason has complex motives which will keep readers guessing. And while Brandy initially appears to be a femme fatale, her role becomes more nuanced.

Although it stutters at times, *Black Cobra* surfaces as a solid sophomore book from an author with proven talent.

JILL ALLEN (May 29, 2013)

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