

Blind Thrust

Samuel Marquis

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With believable, intelligent characters, there is a fine thriller on these pages that could shake things up.

Samuel Marquis's earth-shattering thriller, *Blind Thrust*, excels at making a mystery story, with geology as background, an exciting yarn.

As an employee of the oil company Quantrill Industries in Colorado, Joe Higheagle has had some weird phenomena occur: earthquakes, to be specific, in his normally seismically quiet home state. From October 23 to 31, 2008, Joe and his team search for causes. His allies include his bosses, Jeb and Charles Quantrill, and fellow scientists Mark Kelso, James Nickerson, and Nina Curry. Partnerships shift, however, as the investigators become aware that someone within their midst is a traitor. Can they rout the enemy and preserve the state's safety? Over the course of the story's nine days, the characters try to solve the mystery as they grapple with themes of Big Oil's impact on the environment, the makings of an evildoer, and what creates mob mentality.

Although the book is billed as a Joe Higheagle novel, Joe himself is just one of many characters in the ensemble cast. The big group is not a problem, however, because each character remains well developed with distinctive diction, background, and thought patterns. Joe comes across as particularly likable as the full-blooded Cheyenne is not reduced to a Native American stereotype. The fond relationship Joe has with his grandfather helps lend authenticity to the narrative, and makes their heritage seem an integral part of who they are, rather than a gimmick.

The way in which Joe's grandfather affectionately insults his grandson provides a dash of realistic humor to an otherwise suspenseful story. Like Joe, African American earthquake scientist James Nickerson's race influences his behavior, but he is not defined solely by his skin color. Instead he comes across as a relatable guy trapped in a difficult situation. The nuanced portrayal of the Quantrill brothers in particular humanizes characters engaged in what some deem a field hazardous to the environment. The two men are jovial, sly, and eager to please.

Marquis deftly injects nuances of shrewdness into all his characters, each portrayed as an intelligent person with whom it is easy to empathize. The author's skilled use of third-person omniscient narration and short chapters allow for an intimate portrayal of each player while keeping the plot moving at a high-octane pace. The short chapters also help the book's flow because nearly every section contains a different character's viewpoint. The author has a way with words, creating evocative images such as, "He stood as erect as a clock tower," and, "a trifecta of sugar maples."

The book's missteps are few, but worth mentioning. The novel's summary suggests that more quakes will take place than actually do, and that the plot will focus on the devastation caused by the tremors. In fact, the resultant damage is dealt with in a scant few pages. Additionally, the book does not provide enough explanation for those unfamiliar with geological terms.

Still, there is a fine thriller on these pages that could shake things up.

JILL ALLEN (September 16, 2015)

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