



Breathe

Mike Brogan

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Breathe is a fast-moving work of political intrigue that raises questions of leadership and loyalty.

Mike Brogan's *Breathe* is a suspenseful action novel that follows CIA and FBI agents as they try to unravel a terrorist plot. Pulling from world politics and the actual experiences of former government agents and military experts, *Breathe* reveals the intricacies of security missions while touching on themes of family, loyalty, responsibility, and revenge.

Hasham Habib is a brilliant, bitter terrorist; he has been plotting his revenge against America since the death of his wife. His terror cell abducts Nell Northam, a gifted military scientist. CIA advisor Donovan Rourke is tasked with finding Nell before her specialized knowledge is manipulated to create a new chemical weapon.

The characters' stories intertwine in a tale of revenge and intrigue. While Donovan and his team rush to find clues to Nell's whereabouts and Habib's plot, Nell must rely on her own wits and resourcefulness to survive her time with Habib and his associates.

Breathe is part of a series that features agent Donovan Rourke; here, though, he is hardly the main character. Instead, Nell is the star of the show. She is a refreshingly capable and creative lead; while she is thrust into the position of damsel in distress over and over again, her own inventive actions allow her to survive her time within a terrorist cell.

Habib's villainy is believably, if banally, constructed. He and his team can come off as stereotypes. It is only the addition of a Muslim character working for the United States government that saves *Breathe* from typecasting all of its Middle Eastern characters as terrorists.

The novel is driven by the suspenseful situations that its characters are placed in, rather than by thoroughly developed characterizations; backstories are only touched upon. Differences in speech patterns, habits, and other idiosyncrasies are noticeably absent as the novel unfolds.

The book does not dive deeply into the realities of American and Middle Eastern relations. The difficulties faced by, and the importance of, American government agencies like the CIA drive the novel's political focus. Nell and Donovan both struggle with managing their personal and working lives, and themes of protecting America versus addressing one's family needs lead to sympathetic questions of leadership and loyalty.

The author excels at creating elements of action and suspense, consistently ending chapters on cliffhangers and putting people in seemingly impossible situations that beg for resolution. Though it moves quickly and cycles between points of view, *Breathe* periodically summarizes major plot points through the thoughts of its characters, making the narrative easy to follow.

When Nell and Hasham regularly discuss scientific concepts, they are clearly explained and simple to understand. Major story lines are cleanly wrapped up without confusion, while still leaving opportunities for future stories.

Filled with excitement and cultivating an atmosphere of anticipation, *Breathe* is a fast-moving work of political intrigue.

DELIA STANLEY (September 29, 2017)

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