

Code Name: Total Eclipse

Gary L. Lucas

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The United States has made a mineral discovery that means energy independence for the country, but the resource is in danger of being hijacked by the Centurions, a cabal within the government.

The premise of Gary L. Lucas's *Code Name: Total Eclipse* is exciting: The discovery of a helium isotope on the moon that will make abundant, pollution-free energy, with bad guys seeking control over it. However, Lucas detours through multiple subplots before he drives the action into high gear. About one-fourth of the narrative detours through family histories, military training, Afghanistan combat, romance, marriage, parenthood, divorce, vigilante justice, and the successful turnaround of a newspaper in Paso Robles, California—all backstory to the main plot.

Protagonist Lee Dunway makes his way through ROTC and into the army's Rangers and Special Forces. Along the way he meets Julie, the daughter of a California grape farmer. They marry. It's the post-9/11 era, and Dunway makes stops in Iraq and Afghanistan, and becomes the lone survivor of a rescue mission. He manages to do great damage to the Taliban, and his courage and intelligence earn him a transfer to the CIA, a job that eventually destroys his marriage. Julie returns to California, taking over an uncle's newspaper operation.

With Dunway, the author has created an acceptable derring-do action hero. Peripheral characters are interesting, too, including Dr. James Hollis, a NORAD astrophysicist and an army buddy of Dunway. It's an interesting dynamic to have a front line combat officer end up in astrophysics. The cold-blooded Whitlock, Dunway's CIA control officer, willing to skate past legalities to confront the Centurion menace, is entirely believable in his ends-justify-the-means mindset. Whitlock's character motivations are nicely presented on page.

However, there is a plethora of stilted dialogue that slows down the narrative's pace considerably: "Hmm, your piercing stare and blatant silence are more powerful than words." Additionally, long extemporaneous speeches amplify that effect: "I don't mind saying I've never been concerned over anything in my life than subjecting myself to your do-or-die scenario. My mind is spinning with questions about why the Centurions' organization was not discovered and eradicated sooner. Not to mention I am overwhelmed by the existence of this place and the MJ-12."

For readers of action-adventure, the fact that half the book is gone before the principle plot gets underway is a major problem. The great majority of the narrative unfolds before Dunway rides to the rescue—saddling up the Sea Scorpion, an air-deployed stealth one-man submarine capable of underwater speeds of four hundred miles per hour—in the good guys' effort to keep the He-3 isotope out of the Centurions' grasp.

Although the author is a retired US Army aviator with a good handle on technical gadgetry, he packs three or four books into four hundred pages, including a romance, a war saga, a CIA career, and a cabal attempting to subvert the government, and the first three overwhelm the primary narrative. The story here should be "hero CIA agent saves the world," with the romance, war, and CIA adventures left to other literary efforts.

Nevertheless, readers will appreciate the conclusion, which lays the groundwork for a possible, more focused sequel, giving Lee Dunway a chance to save the world again.

GARY PRESLEY (May 9, 2013)

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