

Hostile Border

Thomas D. Potter

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Thomas D. Potter's *Hostile Border* is a labyrinth of secrets and subterfuge. Iranian terrorists pay a third-rate Mexican drug cartel to smuggle a black-ops team, along with a dirty bomb, into the United States. Meanwhile, a political opposition group in Mexico tries to shoot down the plane carrying their president, who is on his way to negotiate a border treaty with the US president-elect.

Throughout the novel, Potter carefully explores border issues critical to both the United States and Mexico. The US is alarmed at both the amount of drugs and illegal immigrants coming across its border, as well as the violence spreading from Mexico into the southwestern states. On the other hand, the Mexican economy relies heavily upon the millions of dollars sent back to their country by Mexican citizens working—either legally or illegally—in the United States. Defining these issues is a strong point of Potter's work.

There are numerous debates about the border between US President-elect J.C. Salter and his lover, Catherine; his trusted aide, Anderson Wyeth; and his unpaid consultant, Frank, a billionaire with experience in the Middle East. Meanwhile, in Mexico, current President de la Pena and one of his high-ranking officials, Octavio, are having major disagreements over their own country's border strategy. The problem is resolved through both violence and heroism, but not exactly in the way readers might expect.

Unfortunately, what often passes as dialogue in this book is really more a series of speeches. Furthermore, this "dialogue" is very repetitive, and it sounds nothing like how people actually speak to one another. And while the author takes great pains to give his major characters detailed backstories, he doesn't make the same effort to develop the characters themselves. Some of them, like Pedro, head of the cartel, and his top assistant, Ramon, fall right into stereotype. Potter does create a potentially dynamic character in Gretchen Portman, the executive vice president of Prime National Bank in Arizona. Gretchen is portrayed as tough and smart; in fact, she is heavily involved in laundering money for the cartels. It is unfortunate that she has not been given a more significant role in the story.

There are several instances in the book where readers might question the plausibility of certain scenarios. For instance, it is a bit difficult to accept Frank, the billionaire, as an unpaid consultant to the NSA. And there are two occasions where the US president-elect eludes the Secret Service guards and drives off in an unprotected vehicle.

Hostile Border is a deadly chess game about a timely topic. Unfortunately, the book's flaws cannot be ignored.
JOSEPH DEL PRIORE (April 24, 2012)

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