

Jack Bear, X-Ops

R.F. Jeppesen

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Jack Bear, X-Ops is an exciting action thriller that fits naturally in the genre.

R. F. Jeppesen's *Jack Bear, X-Ops* is a complex but grounded and action-filled thriller.

On a Match.com date gone horribly wrong, retired soldier and experienced CIA agent Jack Bear quite literally meets his match in Macintyre, a no-nonsense former special ops agent. This chance encounter unravels a chain of events that put Jack back on the front lines of major government espionage.

As it turns out, the United States government has been involved in the Mexican drug trade, which is ruled by a ruthless kingpin, Hector Guzman. Counting on Jack to meddle, the government sends him on a suicide mission to Afghanistan, but he escapes. Forced to go rogue, he finds himself in a fight against the corrupt system.

This thriller has all the elements of a Tom Cruise action movie, with characters that range from secret agents to drug kingpins. The dialogue is snappy and amusing, starting from the very first scene where Jack finds himself on a date with a government contractor and they exchange witty banter. That dialogue adds an extra dimension to the characters, who bounce off of each other well.

The story takes off fast, wasting no time getting to the main plot, and holds the pace throughout. Surprising twists and turns are plentiful, with the novel always keeping fresh the question of who is trustworthy and who isn't. Military and secret agent aspects of the novel are realistic and balanced. These standard action thriller elements hold suspense and interest, if they don't do much that's new within the genre.

As a lead character, Jack, a former military man and CIA agent with a brutal case of PTSD, is well fleshed out but not always sympathetic. While some of his worse habits come off as defense mechanisms within a troubled mental state, they are still off-putting. He exhibits paranoia and uses language about people of other ethnicities that comes off as disturbing.

A sudden shift in perspective between the first and second chapter is jarring. The narrative comes from Jack's point of view in the first chapter, then switches to third person without warning at the beginning of the second chapter. This shift serves an unclear function and mostly creates confusion, particularly since a highly opinionated tangent about the Mexican drug cartel in the second chapter would read as much more natural in Jack's own voice.

Jack Bear, X-Ops is an exciting action thriller with fun characters and an interesting story.

SONYA LOVY (September 21, 2016)

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