

Jericho 3: An Armageddon Bio-Warfare Thriller

Paul McKellips

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“One day a Christian, a Jew and a Muslim were walking through the valley of Armageddon to have a picnic” is a line that sounds like the opening of a bad joke, but it is crucial to the resolution of *Jericho 3*, an exciting and timely novel of war, terrorism, and a fanatic Iranian religious sect working to bring about the end of the world.

In crafting his terrifying, apocalyptic tale, Paul McKellips draws heavily on his experience as director of the Foundation for Biomedical Research as well as his service as a wartime media advisor in Afghanistan and Iraq. His description of how Iran could acquire and subsequently deploy a biological weapon in Israel is chilling and believable. So too is his explanation of the mind-set and motives of a powerful religious cadre that would not only accept but also welcome the national martyrdom that would result from Israel's nuclear retaliation.

McKellips is not the first author to try to make his readers believe that there are those in Iran willing to pay such a terrible price to start an apocalypse from which they believe their sect of Islam will emerge triumphant. What sets this one apart is that the author does not demonize Muslims or Iranians. Instead, he taken pains to show that most of Iran and the Islamic world would rather live in peace.

The best parts of the novel involve a key character, initially introduced as Omid, whose story, motives, and actions cannot be revealed in a review without spoiling the novel for the reader. Suffice it to say that readers should pay close attention whenever he appears on the page. It is also safe to note that neither the novel's one-dimensional, predictable hero, US Navy Captain “Camp” Campbell, a former SEAL turned trauma surgeon, nor his superintelligent partner in this battle to save the world, biologist Lt. Col. Leslie Raines, offers any surprises.

Secondary characters are also cardboard cutouts from central casting. There is the gruff old general and his toadying “coffee-pouring majors,” the street-savvy retired FBI agent, and the testy Israeli intelligence chief, just to name a few of the familiar stereotypes. The bad guys are no deeper, although there is a deliciously evil fanaticism to the Iranian grandfather of the key evildoer.

A tangential subplot involving the hero's father and his battle with Alzheimer's disease that breaks the pace and distracts the reader. This is clearly a key personal and emotional topic for the author, who, in an afterword, notes that in 2009 alone more Americans died of Alzheimer's and seven other major diseases than, combined, perished in all of the wars the nation has ever fought.

Despite its predictability, fans of the thriller genre will get everything they want and expect from *Jericho 3*, along with a good dose of authenticity concerning the work of Special Forces and drone operations in Afghanistan. There is more talk than action in *Jericho 3*, but when action does occur, it is solid and exciting.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (April 16, 2013)

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