



## Moral Hazards: A Political Thriller

**Tim Martin**

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*Moral Hazards is an instructional thriller with a clear and important message.*

Tim Martin's *Moral Hazards* is a didactic political thriller about rape and war-torn East Africa.

Anik Belanger is an idealistic human rights lawyer who works for Canada's Department of Justice. After losing a case against former Nazi camp guard and pimp Otto Schuman, Anik feels the pangs of defeat. She decides to travel to Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp, the largest such camp in the world. There, Anik pursues her private quest to get rape recognized as a weapon of war and a war crime. Alongside a Somali politician, Omar, Anik struggles for human rights against a cynical United Nations general, his peacekeeping force, and a ruthless warlord, Ibrahim.

This thriller has a purpose: to bring awareness to the use of rape in war. It draws upon well-reported instances of mass rape in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, and Somalia. Its handling of Somalia relies on a concise history of that nation's civil war, on since the 1980s. Real-life people, including former Somali president Siad Barre, who ruled Somalia with an iron hand from 1969 until 1991, appear in the novel.

The writing is crisp and declarative. It is also humane, not only because Anik is driven by a deep-seated sense of justice. Every chapter pulsates with indignation about government corruption, the power of nihilistic warlords, and the often cynical abuse of civilians by UN peacekeepers and NGOs. Anik is the novel's heart, while Omar is depicted as its brains. It is Omar, who serves alongside the dictator Barre before betraying him, who guides the somewhat naïve Anik through the difficult world of African conflicts, especially the never-ending holocaust in Somalia.

Anik and Omar's actions drive the plot, from Omar's fight against Somali violence to Anik's quest to defeat evil. Other important figures include Sophie, whose mother's experiences as a sex slave during the Holocaust drive Anik to pursue justice in Africa; Ibrahim, whose brutality is often depicted as somewhat logical, given Africa's endemic violence; and the many UN bureaucrats who use amoral *realpolitik* as a cover for their bad actions.

The book's conclusion is suggested from the beginning, and is followed by a somewhat unnecessary authorial reiteration of the fact that this is, indeed, a moral tale. "My hidden agenda is," Martin notes, "let's ask [the military] about those whom they will partner and how they will protect civilians."

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BENJAMIN WELTON (April 20, 2020)

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