

Nuclear Rogue

Robert W. Barker

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A splendid combination of action, intrigue, and political struggles make this a standout thriller.

Robert W. Barker's *Nuclear Rogue* is an entertaining, clever, and hair-raising modern-day thriller that skirts the borders of imagination and dips all too close to real life.

The story follows Peter Binder, an ex-Navy SEAL and geologist, through winding intrigues and explosions of action. A splinter Russian terrorist group hijacks a nuclear missile, takes it to the Canadian wilderness, and makes plans to unleash it on an unsuspecting world. The gripping plot conveys a compelling “what-if” scenario.

The terrorist group's plan is twofold: attack a major center of world power, and plunge the rest of the world into war. In an effort to avert that war and disavow the rogues, the Russian government works together with Canada and the United States. Binder, doing geological work near the terrorists' base of operations, is in the thick of their counter-plans.

Standout prose knows when to be crisp and snappy, and when to take its time with details. Pieces are carefully set up before the inevitable knockdown, and before any action takes place, which lends gravitas and atmosphere to later events and reactions.

The author's background as an international gold surveyor becomes apparent in the expert crafting of landscapes. The text shines with embellished atmosphere and detail, including depictions of the wild Canadian lands that the characters operate in.

In successful thriller form, the narrative slowly builds before kicking off and moving without stopping, never pulling punches. Plot twists function well, particularly the shocking cliffhanger of an ending that puts previous events into perspective.

Additional excitement comes via considering parallel real-world events, making the potential outcomes in the novel all the more terrifying, yet prescient, and highlight the often hair-trigger nature of global politics. The narrative maintains a healthy balance between respecting and critiquing the serious nations and organizations present in the novel.

Heroes and villains are well fleshed out, and their struggles and goals are tangible and engaging. The trauma Binder experienced in his career as a Navy SEAL and still contends with is made to mesh with his humor and good nature, resulting in a well-rounded and relatable character.

Likewise, the main villains, though they commit terrible crimes, rationalize their actions in a fascinating way. However, a love story leads to romantic scenes and lovemaking sessions that end up distracting from the larger story.

Nuclear Rogue features a splendid combination of action, intrigue, and political struggles.

CJ TRIPLETT (September 26, 2016)

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