

Oldogs

Kip Cassino

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In the fast-moving political thriller Oldogs, a motley intelligence crew takes on an international and devious terrorist team.

Kip Cassino's weird and wonderful novel *Oldogs* is about a rogue Kazakh warlord, stolen nuclear weapons, and attacks on tropical tourist spots.

Here, the CIA is a shell of its former self. Massive budget cuts shrunk the once feared agency and turned it into a glorified government reserve unit for misfits and washed up bureaucrats. Some of these recruits are known as Oldogs—lonely retirees and veterans who latch onto the agency in order to find meaning and company in their golden years. While the program earns volunteers like a Vietnam veteran and former army captain, Barnett, and a former Chief Master Sergeant, John, some of the Oldogs are neither trained killers nor in shape at all.

Bad news for the CIA comes from a Central Asian republic that was once part of the USSR. Bolat, Kazakhstan's Minister of Energy, and a dangerous Turk, Gurban, have hatched a dangerous plan to steal nuclear weapons and smuggle them into the West. Their targeted spots include Cancun and Miami. This terrorism demands a response, but all the United States can call upon are the Oldogs.

With a strong balance between their descriptions, exposition, action, and dialogue, the book's scenes of espionage and counterterrorism are convincing. This is especially true when the action takes place behind the scenes at Langley, or at the Oldogs' training center at Camp Peary. In these scenes, government bureaucrats, frontline combat veterans, and rear-echelon types stand at an eternal divide, their situations described with precision. However, the book's wealth of characters is difficult to track.

The text, and its military-aligned cast, go heavy on the acronyms, so working knowledge of global intelligence agencies helps when approaching this fast-paced tale. As it weaves in politics, betrayal, desperation, and loads of action, the novel becomes addictive, making its outwardly overblown plot believable. Bolat and Gurban may have outlandish motivations, but their plans unfold with evil logic. The activities of the Oldogs are likewise true to life. The book's bittersweet ending serves not only as the conclusion to a wonderful tale, but as a reminder that Oldogs can indeed learn new tricks, even kick butt when the need is there.

In the fast-moving political thriller *Oldogs*, a motley intelligence crew takes on an international and devious terrorist team.

BENJAMIN WELTON (December 17, 2020)

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