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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ GENERAL FICTION

Spy Subs in Sweden: A Trilogy

Parker F. Campbell
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“Bloodthirsty” bikini-clad female commandos, a “dirty dozen” of the world’s finest combat frogmen, killer robots, and a 450-pound “chocoholic nuclear maniac” are just a few of the characters and creations Parker F. Campbell has packed into his outrageous, often ridiculous, and sometimes just downright silly trilogy built around Russian mini subs that threaten Sweden and the world.

Campbell’s *Spy Subs in Sweden: A Trilogy* is meant to entertain readers who like their technological military thrillers spiced up with fantastic weapons, spy heroics, and cartoon villains. His style is that of a pulp fiction writer of the 1950s—short on science but long on imagination—whose simple characters are intentionally one-dimensional. Campbell’s good guys are good and his bad guys are bad, and there is no gray area.

Each novella in the trilogy utilizes (as its premise) a secret submarine that will allow its masters to dominate the globe. In “Minisub 83,” the first of the three stories, the seven-meter-long undersea boat, powered by a miniature nuclear reactor, is “the ultimate in insidiousness.” That story is set during the Cold War (the “83” in the title referring to the year 1983), and Sweden calls upon former US Navy SEAL, fighter pilot, and underwater warfare expert Peterson Smith for help in defending itself from the Soviet threat. Campbell resolves the plot in a manner not unfamiliar to fans of Tom Clancy by way of Clive Cussler, and he tosses in a *Knight Rider*-style talking computer to help his plucky hero win the day.

“Minisub 99” is a variation on the same theme, except that Peterson Smith is more James Bond than Jack Ryan. It is 1999 and the Soviets are no more, but a Russian master criminal has developed an even more advanced nuclear mini sub, which he uses to smuggle nuclear materials and deploy suitcase bombs in cities around the world. Once again, Sweden calls upon Peterson Smith to take on the bad guy.

If Campbell’s Peterson is Jack Ryan in “Minisub 83” and James Bond in “Minisub 99,” in “Minisub 2010” he is Austin Powers. While the first two stories each contained at least a tiny kernel of reality at their core, the third is pure pulp fiction: The mini sub is not only a submarine but also a spaceship, and one that can turn into an SUV—on Mars! The Russian villain in the third story, the Galactic Wizardess, rules an underwater “City of Gold” populated by genetically altered Amazon astronauts. Anyone familiar with the B-movie science-fiction films of the 1950s will recognize where the characters and plot originate.

Campbell’s writing is done all in good fun, but fans of more serious authors of the genre will find much to pick at in *Spy Subs in Sweden*. But those seeking old-fashioned, intentionally outrageous fun could do far worse than to plumb the depths of the Baltic with Commodore Peterson Smith and his creator, Parker F. Campbell.
MARK MCLAUGHLIN (April 16, 2013)

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