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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ THRILLER

The Rosetta Cylinder

Neil Pollack
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For American archaeologist Don Carter, the football-sized golden cylinder embedded in the rock of the Peruvian Andes is a rare find. Just how rare he doesn't realize until tests show he may have discovered an alien's thousands-of-years-old capsule that can unlock secrets of the universe. But first he must decipher the star-chart inscriptions on the capsule's exterior and decode the language of the voiced message inside.

In Neil Pollack's five-star sci-fi thriller, Carter also needs to hide the capsule from false friends and protect it from ruthless enemies. The fast-paced, well-written story is told through a manuscript the dying archaeologist presents to his son. *The Rosetta Cylinder* is ideally suited for an audience looking for the action and suspense of extraterrestrial mysteries in remote earthly settings.

The enigma of the cylinder is enhanced by its appropriate comparison to the ancient Rosetta stone as a key for unlocking universal mysteries. In guarding its own secrets, Carter's ancient artifact exhibits awesome powers, including an ability to emit deadly, rock-melting radiation if it is physically assaulted—a characteristic Carter uses to his advantage in a nail-biting, life-and-death car chase.

Carter and his sixty-five-year-old mentor, Dr. Anton Steinert, have a pure motive for using the artifact: the betterment of humanity. For Carter's turncoat friend, Diego Gonzales, and a murderous thug helping him steal the capsule, the motive is to acquire huge riches by causing a bidding war between the United States and Russia. As for the governments of Peru, the United States with their CIA, and Russia with their KGB, the motives are to obtain worldwide power. In the final analysis, there are no winners in these clashes, only family bystanders left with a manuscript of what could have been and the mystery of where in the world a football-sized golden cylinder or its replicas might be.

To Pollack's credit, his depictions of the characters' checkered backgrounds, their motivations, and their secrets are ones his readers will find to be fully developed, consistent, and credible. Even the story itself "is one the government never wanted made public," Carter's wife tells their son. For her, the CIA's efforts to keep it quiet made Mafia hit men seem like "small potatoes next to these guys," an apt description considering the exciting scene near the end of the novel of a CIA raid gone wrong. The references to archaeological and historical facts and events, to Peruvian cities and locations, and to well-known authors and icons of alien studies and sightings (e.g., Rosswell and Project Blue Book) also add to the authenticity of the story.

The cover-art grandeur of the mountains where Carter retrieved the cylinder is an enticing introduction to the book, and the reference on the cover to the author's earlier novel, *Almost Armageddon*, is useful for readers wishing to read his other publications to determine if the are as superbly crafted as this highly-recommended novel, *The Rosetta Cylinder*.

WAYNE CUNNINGHAM (March 29, 2013)

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