Clarion Review

General

The Savannah Project
Chuck Barrett
Switchback Publishing
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Terrorism, duty, and personal safety collide when National Transportation Safety Board investigator, Jake Pendleton, is called to the scene of a suspicious airplane crash in Savannah, Georgia, on Saint Patrick's Day. He, his coworkers, and his lover soon find themselves embroiled in an explosive plot of treachery with international consequences. In his debut novel, *The Savannah Project*, master aviator and air traffic controller, Chuck Barrett, weaves a taut, pulse-pounding thriller. The title refers to the codename the terrorists use for their dastardly deeds.

Skillfully using omniscient narration, Barrett allows readers inside the heads of the heroes and the villains. Nearly every character is well-rounded, with a fully fleshed-out back story. Unlike some thrillers, women help propel the action instead of serving as one-dimensional love objects. While testosterone does rule the day, many multi-faceted females hold their own.

Settings, too, pop off the page. Barrett takes readers on a rollicking ride through Georgian swamps, creepy airplane hangars, bustling parade routes, and sprawling Irish ruins. In each place, the author vividly depicts the sights and sounds. Additionally, Barrett heightens the suspense by using short, quick paragraphs. He also throws readers *in medias res* by leaving them to figure out whose point of view each chapter is narrated from. When readers reach the last page, they will be amped up for the rollercoaster of twists and turns to continue, only to discover the author has left them on tenterhooks, laying the perfect groundwork for a sequel.

Several minor glitches prevent this topnotch thriller from being flawless. First, for readers new to the world of airplanes and air traffic controllers, the amount of flight-industry-specific vocabulary and abbreviations can be overwhelming and confusing. Clearly, Barrett is knowledgeable about the aviation milieu, but sometimes helpful information gets lost in this information overload, or the plot gets bogged down. Secondly, the main villain has a rare

genetic syndrome, which is mentioned several times in passing, but its symptoms are never fully explained. Finally, numerous grammatical errors are present.

In the face of powerhouse characters, a riveting plot, and near-constant suspense, such hiccups can be easily overlooked. All in all, *The Savannah Project* represents a superior effort for this newly-minted novelist.

Jill Allen