

The Stormglass Protocol

Tim Pratt

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Stormglass Ventures (Sep 4, 2013)

Softcover \$7.99 (278pp)

978-0-9899336-0-5

This tale of youth confronting adult greed, combined with comic book villains and a Bond-like atmosphere, is a promising beginning to the Stormglass series.

Mutant bees. An international organization of elite spies. Capaciously resourceful teens. *The Stormglass Protocol*, a well-paced adventure, features a brilliant twist on the classic theme of villainous world domination with a winsome, contemporary mix of gadgetry and wits.

One summer, Jake finds himself recruited by Stormglass, the fictional UN-sponsored group comprising children and adolescents with a strong sense of justice. With cohorts Lizzie Lewis and Filby, Jake travels to England, Argentina, Russia, and Tanzania in an effort to thwart the activities of Vindiqa, a candy company and research outfit with extensive involvement in the underworld.

Co-authors Tim Pratt—author of short story collections, novels, and other writings as well as a Hugo Award winner—and Andy Deemer, filmmaker and founder of the gaming company Stormglass, display a knack for rendering precocity. Jake in particular emerges as a quick study who readily improvises solutions. Thoughtful interweaving of dangerous and quieter scenes also makes this a captivating read, though it is the plot involving colony collapse disorder and a swarm of modified bees that resounds for its insidious cleverness.

This first book in a planned series leaves plenty of room for exploration of the Stormglass headquarters and training program, and for Jake to strengthen his abilities while reaching higher levels of security clearance. Carefully placed hints about Jake's parents—who once played spy games themselves, and who maintain a bemused distance from their son's newfound activities—also suggest that they may know more than they let on.

Adversaries include comic book types, such as a doctor who conducted human experiments, buffoonish henchmen, and a scarred man with a bionic arm. They serve as recognizable figures, but do not yet reach the complexity and truly frightening status of worthy opponents. A subplot involving a Stormglass traitor is also quickly introduced and resolved with seemingly few consequences for the character. Cinematic flourishes—from an action sequence on a train to dramatic fights and the final confrontation—pay homage to the spy genre while maintaining freshness. A British bee expert's secluded estate particularly evokes a Bond-like atmosphere.

The Stormglass Protocol examines timeless themes of duty, loyalty, bravery, and morality. For older teens, more sophisticated themes on the fragile balance between science and nature, ethics, and corporate progress offer thought-provoking material beyond the book. Familiarity with the Stormglass iPad game is not required; this tale of youth confronting adult greed succeeds on its own, and is a promising beginning.

KAREN RIGBY (November 24, 2013)

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