

The Surface Beneath

Dennis Quiles

LitFire Publishing (Jan 29, 2018)

Softcover \$29.99 (620pp)

978-1-64151-305-0

A government conspiracy is at the heart of this action-heavy thriller.

Dennis Quiles's action-packed thriller *The Surface Beneath* seethes with violence, sexual intrigue, and political corruption.

When former naval intelligence officer turned private investigator Jack Steele meets FBI Agent Kathy Stevens, he rapidly becomes entangled in a web of deceit and violence that puts him in direct opposition to extremely powerful people within the government—people who are willing to kill to keep their secrets hidden. These secrets force Jack down a path of ever-increasing danger, putting his life and the lives of those he grows close to at risk.

The idea behind the story is compelling: a corrupt government and a decades-old conspiracy to expose that corruption at any cost. However, abundant grammatical and typographical errors, along with awkward turns of phrase, are a constant distraction from what has the potential to be a captivating story.

Particularly confusing is the novel's tendency to suddenly and randomly switch from first-person to third-person narration. There's no clear indication who is speaking; the audience is forced to infer this based on character locations, complicating and frustrating matters. The use of italics throughout is equally sporadic and perplexing, appearing and disappearing at random and unnecessarily in the middle of a sentence.

The novel tends to drag; the leaps from one location and perspective to another create an illusion of fast-paced action, but the story itself is slow to develop. The plot development is put on hold for the sake of pages of fight scenes that, due to their frequency, lose their thrill and add unnecessary length to the book. There is a clear and satisfactory conclusion, however, to the novel's main story line, alleviating some of the confusion felt throughout the bulk of the story.

Each chapter begins with a quote by an influential historical figure—Franklin D. Roosevelt, for example, or Ernest Hemingway. Quotes sometimes even come from the author himself. While they are interesting, the quotes do not meaningfully relate to the chapters they initiate.

Extensive technical knowledge regarding weaponry and government equipment permeates the story. Each weapon a character brandishes is described in extensive detail, though these descriptions are often too in-depth and specific to carry much weight for the lay reader.

There are not clear transitions between scenes, even between those occurring in different time periods. As the novel transitions from one character's perspective to another's, it becomes less coherent. It is impossible to meaningfully connect to the characters themselves between the novel's many fight sequences and shootouts. Superfluous backstories are provided, but they are only an additional cumbersome element.

The Surface Beneath is a thriller that boasts an interesting premise but comes up short in its execution.

REBECCA KIRKPATRICK (January 30, 2019)

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