

## Unknown Book

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With its complicated plot, lots of action, and characters who could grace the pages of a superhero comic, this electronic book is rich in the details of military operations and the chaos that is Russian politics today. Sometimes too rich. Readers with a strong interest in things military may enjoy the details, but they tend to slow the action in the story of a major skirmish between the Russian elite Special Security Force and the American troops in charge of the Ammunition Depot at Infernesk. In places it reads like a training manual the author could have written while he was an Assistant Professor at West Point.

Major Valerie Macintyre is the new Executive Officer assigned to the Depot where American military personnel are responsible for decommissioning weapons of mass destruction formerly owned by the Soviet Union. Horribly understaffed and ill-trained, this company, primarily made up of women, must hold Infernesk Depot against Colonel Victor Dimonokov, whose heart and soul belong to Mother Russia.

The very real and continuing despair of many old-school Russians is summed up nicely in an exchange between Dimonokov and his mentor, Sergeant Stegler, who says, "It is Russia. There are no good choices. A man does what he can. The rest he leaves to Providence, and then he takes a drink."

Macintyre is a fresh, tough heroine in a genre usually focused on her male counterparts. That characterization, however, would have been stronger without several references to her "going to have a good cry." Seasoned Army officers of either sex seldom let anyone know they occasionally give in to this perceived weakness, even in fiction, and it was the wrong reaction for a woman who was striving for respect.

One of her strongest allies is Sergeant Major Edward T. Denight, who is every inch the soldier. Some of his troops "almost believed that Denight, with his close-cropped gray hair and time-in-country lined and weathered face, really had been in the Army since 'Christ was a corporal.'" Yet, here, too, the characterization sometimes suffers from reactions and behaviors that don't ring true.

Despite those flaws, the story is compelling and the writing vivid. One could almost feel the cold wind blowing from the steppes and see the fog that diffused the light "causing an eerie, disorienting slow dance of glare."

MARYANN MILLER (May / June 2003)

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