



Dead Zero

Stephen Hunter

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From *New York Times* bestselling author and Pulitzer Prize winner Stephen Hunter comes a thriller that pits former Marine sniper Bob Lee Swagger against the only man who might be able to outshoot him.

A marine sniper team on a mission in tribal territories on the Afghan-Pakistan border, Whiskey 2-2 is ambushed by professionals using the latest high-tech shooting gear. Badly wounded, the team's sole survivor, Gunnery Sergeant Ray Cruz, aka "the Cruise Missile," is determined to finish his job. He almost succeeds when a mystery blast terminates his enterprise, leaving a thirty-foot crater where a building used to be—and where Sergeant Cruz was meant to be hiding.

Months pass. Ray's target, an Afghan warlord named Ibrahim Zarzi, sometimes called "The Beheader," becomes an American asset in the region and beyond, beloved by State, the Administration, and the Agency. He arrives in Washington for consecration as Our Man in Kabul.

And that brings Ray Cruz out of hiding.

Swagger, the legendary hero of seven of Hunter's novels from *Point of Impact* to last year's bestselling *I, Sniper*, is recruited by the FBI to stop the Cruise Missile from reaching his target. The problem is that the more Swagger learns about what happened in Zabol, the more he questions the US government's support of Zarzi and the more he identifies with Cruz as hunter instead of prey.

Dead Zero Details

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From Reader Review Dead Zero for online ebook

Mike (the Paladin) says

I just finished this book and the one that follows it in the "series" (if I may call them a series) Soft Target (review to follow, LOL). I've now read all but one of the books considered part of the Bob Lee Swagger series except one. I somehow missed the third in the series (Time To Hunt) I'm about halfway through that one. These books are a mixed bag.

I know someone's out there shaking their head thinking (or yelling at the screen), "yeah but I came here for a review on THIS book."

Okay, valid point but I do need to give some context as to what I'm going to say. See, I think this is one of the two weakest in the series, yet I also see why Mr. Hunter went the way he did in some places.

This is a fast moving book with a pretty good plot a well drawn cast of characters (if some are a bit shallow, but come on this is an action novel, not *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich: A Novel*). You get plenty of fireworks. So for that I like it it comes close to getting the 4 stars. The problem here is that it's not quite as good as the books by Mr. Hunter I've rated a 4....leaves me with a conundrum.

So what are the negatives here? A couple I'll mention below under a spoiler tag, but the "in general" answer is that this Bob Lee is not the Bob Lee I know in many ways. Also there is a bit of strained story telling (though, as I mentioned above I see the reason for it). There is also a continuing story or plot thread that just gripes me... so while it's a good, slam bang action read I liked most of the series better. As a matter of fact the book that proceeds this I, Sniper I gave 5 stars and put on my favorites list.

Okay bottom line before spoilers, 3 stars but a high 3, maybe 3.5 and a good read. I can safely recommend this to anyone who likes a good action read.

(view spoiler)

Bill says

Stephen Hunter brought his "A" game to Dead Zero. In the initial chapters in Afghanistan, military sniper Sgt Rey Cruz and his spotter begin their authorized assignment to kill a terrorist known as the "Beheader." The two soldiers are ambushed by three American mercenaries under contract to an unknown high U.S. government official. Cruz survives two attempts on his life and then the cat & mouse begins back in the U.S. Cruz vows to kill the Afghan terrorist who has become the darling of the CIA as the most favored Afghan to run Afghanistan so he is in Washington DC to meet with the president, high government officials, and members of the military and law enforcement agencies.

At this point the FBI calls on Bob "The Nailer" Swagger--the greatest military sniper in the hisotry of the

armed forces to use his skills to find fellow sniper Rey Cruz. The action ratches up on every page, the surprises are numerous, and Bob stays one step ahead of law enforcement in figuring out where Rey will set up his kill zone. Wait until the morning to start reading the book. You won't want to stop until you get the last two words in the book--Dead Zero.

Scott Holstad says

This book started out really well, but the ending was so incredibly stupid that I have to give it just a couple of stars. The book starts out with Ray Cruz, a Marine sniper who is tasked with having to assassinate an Afghan warlord named Ibrahim Zarzi. However, out in the Afghan wilderness, he and his spotter are jumped by mercenaries (American). His spotter is killed, he is wounded, but escapes. He tries to complete his mission, but a missile destroys the building he was going to use to do it on.

Fast forward in time. The FBI comes to one Bob Lee Swagger, the hero of Hunter's books up til now. Retired and an old former Marine sniper, they want his help in locating and stopping Cruz, because they've received a message from Cruz that he's going to somehow finish his mission, killing Zarzi in the US as he tours the country. He's changed his ways and is an American golden boy now, and we're promoting him for Afghan president. The problem is, the mercs are still after Cruz, and now they're after Swagger.

It's an action packed, fast paced mystery/thriller that is pretty exciting and even though it's not remotely believable, unlike Alex Berenson's novels, it's still a good ride. And then something happens. A few things.

I don't know how to write spoilers in these reviews, so I'm just going to write it here:

*** SPOILER ALERT***

Cruz turns out to be Swagger's son. Nice coincidence, that, don't you think? Now we can keep the book series alive, even as Swagger gets to be too old to continue. I didn't like that. Not at all. And I've read the next Cruz book and I hated it, so ... not thrilled.

The FBI finds out there's an emergency at the White House and they need a sniper. They call all of their snipers and find they've all gone home because they're tired out from what they just went through. So the FBI goes to the White House with Swagger and Cruz, who apparently aren't tired at all. But here's the thing -- doesn't the president have the ... Secret Service at all times? Wouldn't you think they'd have plenty of men around to terminate the threat? Wonder why Hunter didn't think of that....

Here's the kicker. Major spoiler. The ending is so damn stupid as to make the entire book useless. The bad guy did everything because he's pissed off at the West (and the US) for the introduction of the birth control pill in 1960 and what that has done to women. Yep. Women work now and earn just as much, if not more, than men. (Don't know where Hunter got that utterly false statistic.) Women should be barefoot and pregnant, apparently, and should know their place. The family unit is shrinking. Western society got along quite nicely for centuries with men in the lead and now, thanks to birth control, women are running wild. So Islam, with its misogynistic views, is our only hope. Yeah, I know. Can you believe that shit? That's the biggest pile of horseshit I've ever read. To think that an intelligent reading audience would buy that as the reason for taking down the US by a traitor is asinine. So I would give this book one star, but I'm giving it two because it was exciting, up til that point. Still, definitely not recommended.

Mike says

Dead Zero Every time I'm in a jam, I just ask myself "what would Bob Lee Swagger do"? But looks like ole Bob Lee is getting a mite old and slow, so we have a new addition to the mix, Ray Cruz, Marine sniper and one mean fella on a mission to avenge his spotter, killed in an ambush in Afghanistan. This one gets a strong 4 Stars but not 5, because it was just too similar in many ways to Point Of Impact and did not meet the excitement level I expect from Mr. Hunter. Still, no one does bloody, loud, messy combat scenes any better:

(view spoiler)

His action scenes are always superb, like a string of those strobelight films of bullets blasting through apples...except the bullets are not going into fruit but into flesh and bone:

(view spoiler)

You will be fully satisfied with this chapter in the BLS saga and he gives us a vector to a whole new, modern takeoff on the sniper vs. the bad guy genre he has mastered.

Fredrick Danysh says

Semper Fedelis is more than just a motto to most Marines instead being a way of life. In Afghanistan Gunnery Sergeant Ray Cruz is part of a sniper team that is ambushed by mercenaries while on a mission. Cruz disappears and six months later sends a message to his Recon battalion that he will complete his mission. The target now claims to be a friend of the United States and and retired Marine sniper Bob Lee Swaggar to prevent Cruz from finishing his mission. A fast paced military thriller with much of the action set in the USA.

Shelley says

Dead Zero is the seventh book in the Bob Lee Swagger series, and probably the most politically charged one when it comes to the actual setting of the story.

Reyes Fidencio Cruz aka Rzay Cruz, is a 42 year old USMC Sniper and one of the best there is. He's turned down numerous requests for promotion, and alot better paying onces in the private sector to remain in the corps. In other words, he's a patriot and he loves his job. He and his spotter partner Lance Corporal Skelton are sent deep into Afghanistan in order to kill a terrorist named Ibrahmi Zarzi. Zarzi is a warlord, opium merchant, prince, spy, charmer, betrayer and Taliband and Al-Qaeda sympathizer.

Along the way, Cruz is attacked by AMERICAN contractors hired by someone withing the US government in order to stop him from killing Zarzi. Skelton isn't as lucky as Cruz in that he is taken out almost immediately by the contractors. Cruz finds himself having to fight for his life, and does everything he can do in order to complete his mission. Unfortunately, the hit goes wrong and Cruz escapes yet again with his life in tact. Those sent to kill him, however, believe that they were successful.

Enter Bob Lee Swagger, who is now 64 years old, and home on his Idaho rance with his wife Julie, and

daughter Miko (read the 47th Samarui if you want to know more about Miko.) Nick Memphis, assistant director of the FBI and Bob's friend, along with Susan Okada, who Bob has more than feelings for, arrive to ask for Bob's assistance in bring Cruz to justice. Cruz, it seems, has already made it clear to those in charge that he intends to complete the original mission and take out Zarzi.

Skip to the good parts-----

1. Bob agrees and ends up being an FBI investigator with a badge and everything.
2. There are 3 terrorists who make their way into the USA via Mexico, (Of course, nobody saw that coming).
3. Bob gets tagged by the original contractor team of Carl Crane, Anthony Zemke and Michael "Mick" Bogier, who then follow him around via Satellite which eventually leads them to a meeting between Cruz and Swagger in which BLS is hurt by a flying desk.
4. The contractors are being led by a voice calling himself MacGuyver. Cheeky bastard.
5. BLS and Sterling (FBI Agent Chandler) end up at Cheech AFB looking into who gave the order to blow up the building. BLS is told that one of the operators has decided to leave the service. BLS learns that this person, LT. Dombrowski, took the shot that nearly killed Cruz. After speaking with her one on one, she agrees to help them out. Dombrowski is actually a scapegoat in this entire affair.
6. Meanwhile, a very reluctant Susan Okada finds out about a CIA program called Pentameter which was responsible for nearly killing Cruz. Okada until the very end is very pro-CIA and doesn't believe any of this was sanctioned by the CIA itself. WHATEVER!
7. Meanwhile, the three terrorists are making their way across the US without anyone thinking anything about it. They would eventually end up in DC itself where they intend to take out the President and the entire leadership of the US.
8. BLS informs Cruz in the series stunner, that he is his father, and that his mother was actually killed while he served in Vietnam. (DNA Tests have not been confirmed by the end of the story.)
9. In the finale, we learn that National Intelligence Director Ted Hollister is a muslim sympathizer and planned the entire operation because he fully believed that women are the ruination of the entire western world. WTF?!?! seriously?
10. In a fitting ending. Lt. Jameson, female and best UV drone operator in the Air Force, does the killing shot that puts and end to Hollister and other terrorists. Sad part: Susan Okada is killed by Hollister when he escapes during the attack on the white house.

Thoughts: First, I've read each and every book in this series and it's way past obvious that Mr Hunter can write. He has some of the best technical descriptions of armaments around, and probably has a slew of advisors to call on when needed.

The plot itself was easy to follow. A marine is betrayed by his own country, and BLS comes to the rescue, again. It will be interesting to see if there is another, whether or not Cruz is actually BLS's son. Afterall, BLS has been searching for him for decades.

Next, the political aspet of this book wasn't overly done, but the manifesto at the end was a bit over the top. Seriously? I mean I realize that some men want to have their women in the house making babies and keeping the house clean and all. But, blaming the worlds problems on them? OK, I just went off the deep end. Sorry. There's also a bit way more testosterone that I like in this particular book with the Hooyah, we're contractors and we kill innocent people.. No big dude!

My overall rating is 3.5.

Will says

SUBJECTIVE READER REVIEW WITH PLOT SPOILERS

I've previously read six books by Stephen Hunter, and if you checked up on me, you'd see that I've assigned an average of 5.0 for the six novels. 'Dead Zero' ain't gonna break that trend friend, I can guarantee you! I cannot help but compare Stephen Hunter and Daniel Silva in the way they invent new black operations to seduce their action man out of contented retirement. In 'Dead Zero,' the decorated king sniper of Vietnam fame is 64, in pain constantly from six otherwise fatal war wounds, has difficulty walking normally, but is sucked from retirement when his old buddy FBI Deputy Director Nick Memphis brings in Bob Lee's kryptonite, CIA analyst Susan Okada. Secretly lusting after 'The One' with whom he shares unrequited attraction, Bob Lee Swagger is soon snagged hook, line and sinker in finding a rogue US Marine sniper who's intent on killing the prospective Afghan Presidential Candidate Ibrahim Zarzi. The fact that Zarzi was known as a Taliban and Al Qaeda consort, grew incredibly wealthy from Afghan poppy syrup and was known as 'The Beheader' led directly to mission Whiskey 2-2, a two man sniper team dispatched to end Zarzi's aging process. So US Marine Gunnery Sergeant and master sniper Ray Cruz and his spotter Lance Corporal Billy Skelton launch out into the inhospitable mountain terrain equivalent of the Sahara-dead man's land-as goat herders!

But the grey zone powers that be have now anointed Zarzi the best hope for the future of Afghanistan, allegedly thoroughly vetted by the CIA, and of course the best man for the US of A. This dramatic six-month turn around apparently didn't make it down the channels to the Pentagon's hardy killers in the Kush, as they are intent on fulfilling Whiskey 2-2, and Marine honor, and damn near pull it off. Incredibly the Director of National Intelligence, via the CIA Afghan Desk Director Jackson 'MacGyver' Collins, hire on the most dangerous and capable hunters from the dark side to track Whiskey 2-2 and stop it. Now I'll admit that Hunter did some interesting research for 'Dead Zero,' because MacGyver's squad lead Mick Bogier's hauling a 27-lb Barrett .50 caliber sniper rifle through the Kush, kills spotter Billy Skelton and 'nicks' Ray Cruz.

The detail in which Hunter describes the kinetic energy generated by the .50 cal rifle upon impact helps explain the videos I watched 15 years ago, basically spotter camera film of the impact of the .50 caliber from a mile away, shot by some Canadian sniper in Afghanistan. Invariably the spotter would show the Al Qaeda or Taliban enemy as some jag of rock, otherwise imperceptible as a human being. Five seconds after the sniper pulls the trigger, an instantly killed soldier's body, nearly severed in half, goes flying into the air like a whirly-bird. That's the kinetic energy that blew Ray Cruz twenty feet backwards through the air by getting 'nicked' in the leg by such a round.

I first learned of this kinetic energy effect 18 years ago, when a US Army ammo buyer showed me a cut-away 120 mm tank sabot round. No explosive, but a tungsten rod maybe an inch in diameter had a sabot skeletal guide form that disintegrated upon leaving the tank barrel. By then the tungsten rod was projected so fast at an enemy tank that when it struck-and kept on going-the kinetic energy disintegrated everything inside the tank, which of course leads to death and catastrophic explosion. Ray Cruz had a mission, and even Graywolf's premier kill team wasn't gonna stop him. He did fail in his mission to kill Zarzi in Qalat in Zabul Province however, when the DNI gave the PENTAMETER authorization to launch a Paveway Two thermobaric smart bomb from the MQ-9 Reaper, vaporizing the three-story hotel he was supposedly in and leaving a thirty foot crater in its wake.

Ray Cruz ain't easy to fool however, and he manages to be absent when the Paveway Two explodes, then he's in the wind awaiting his turn to fulfill Whiskey 2-2, Presidential candidate or not! Paranoia grows insidiously within the CIA as Ibrahim Zarzi, darling of the Americans, travels to Washington to announce to the world his candidacy for President of Afghanistan--in the White House Rose Garden no less!

Of course, there's comradery and synergy between Bob Lee Swagger and Ray Cruz, and Swagger confounds the feebs and Langley's killers as he keeps guessing right, finds Cruz, befriends him and always followed five minutes later by MacGyver's kill team. But Ray Cruz is the modern incarnation of Bruce Willis in 'Die Hard' and won't go down easily. Finally when he gets an opportunity to kill Zarzi outside his brother's Baltimore restaurant, Swagger spots the setup and Cruz withdraws-from the city dump truck! It becomes apparent to some that Cruz is the second best sniper who ever lived, after Bob Lee Swagger. But then Swagger remembers his past in Vietnam, and nobody's sure of Cruz' background, assuming he's Philippino. Then Cruz visits Swagger in his room the night after the aborted Zarzi hit and Swagger correctly maps out the invisible path of paternity, acknowledging that Cruz is, in fact, Bob Lee Swagger's illegitimate son. Overcoming every molecule of caution in his body, Cruz agrees to come in, but no prison time. But it ain't over 'til it's over.

The ending of this book will have you wondering what form of mind-altering assistance Hunter had when he crocheted it together! In-fucking-credible is all I'll tell ya. Get it and read it, you'll love it. I sure did.

Chris says

Didn't like this as much as his other books I've read.

Alex Gherzo says

What a way to start the new year! Stephen Hunter is one of my very favorite writers, and Dead Zero is worthy of standing with his best work.

Ray Cruz, a marine corps sniper stationed in Afghanistan, is sent to kill a notorious Pashtun warlord with links to Al Qaeda: Ibrahim Zarzi, dubbed "the Beheader" due to his treatment of captured soldiers. But before he can make his kill, Cruz is attacked by a private black ops team and presumed dead in a massive explosion. Months later, Zarzi is in the US as a guest of the American government; he's a new asset that will help transition the Afghan government from the Taliban. But Cruz resurfaces as well, determined to finish the job he started half a world away. Betting on the axiom "Send a sniper to catch a sniper," the FBI and CIA reach out to Bob Lee Swagger to bring in the wayward marine. But, during his investigation, Bob Lee unravels a conspiracy that may put him on the same side as his quarry.

Heavy spoilers...

Just as Hunter is one of my favorite authors, Bob Lee Swagger is one of my favorite literary heroes. This time, though, he shares the spotlight a bit with Ray Cruz (although he's still very much the main character). Clearly, this book is an attempt to set up Cruz as the lead in his own series (clearer still in hindsight, as the book Hunter wrote directly following Dead Zero is a Cruz solo adventure; Swagger fans such as myself need not fret, however, as Bob the Nailer returns subsequently). Usually, these endeavors come with mixed results at best, but Hunter is just too damn good for that. He avoids the usual pitfalls, like minimizing the existing character to play up the new blood, by making these elements relevant to the story. Why doesn't Bob Lee just kick Cruz' ass and call it a day? Because he doesn't want to. Because there's something about Cruz that makes the cantankerous old gunfighter sympathize with him. Swagger understands snipers, and he

understands marines, and he knows what's going through the younger man's head because he's been in the same situation before. Bob Lee is determined not just to seek justice, but to save one of his own.

His discovery that Cruz is actually his son had me worried; it seemed obvious and clichéd. But Hunter makes it work without drowning the book in sentimentality. He doesn't go the obvious route, with bitter resentment culminating in a tearful reconciliation. Instead, it's simply new information for Cruz, something he doesn't have much time to process in the heat of battle. The focus is still on Bob Lee, who becomes more of a dad than Cruz does a son, looking out for him, protecting him from both the FBI and the hit team trying to kill him, expressing his displeasure when the younger man risks his life and, in the climax on the White House lawn, acting as his son's spotter. The Swagger men don't bond by playing ball or talking about cars, they bond by firing sniper rifles at bad guys. In that moment, Bob Lee stops trying to shield his son and helps him live in the world he's chosen. Bob now has back a piece of the world he thought he'd lost so many years ago, while Ray Cruz has ties to the world he never thought he would. I'm looking forward to seeing where Hunter takes the characters from here.

My appreciation for this is helped by the fact that Cruz is a good character in his own right. Again, Hunter avoids cliché. Cruz isn't arrogant or hot-headed. He's actually quite respectful of Bob Lee, as well as the other people in charge. He doesn't have a chip on his shoulder, he doesn't hate the world, he merely wants to see justice done, for corruption to be exposed. And, when push comes to shove, he'll gladly sacrifice himself to save an innocent woman. He's got the Swagger hero gene and it makes him all the more appealing.

The action, as always in a Hunter book, is terrific. No one, and I mean NO ONE, writes an action sequence like Stephen Hunter. He has a way of making them both clear and frantic, so you always know what's happening as you're breathlessly waiting to learn what happens next. He once again goes into great detail about the guns in the novel, and there are some great ones this time. He also reveals much about the way aerial drones work. There are some fascinating insights into the mindsets of drone operators. One, for example, is piloting a drone to take out some very bad people while simultaneously trying to decide what shade of toenail polish to apply when she goes out with her boyfriend later that night; a sort of extreme sports multitasking.

In his more recent books, Hunter's political opinions are beginning to show a bit, though never to distraction. The press, and the New York Times in particular, get another drubbing as left-wing loonies who fawn over the current administration while seeking to vindicate America's enemies and vilify anyone on the opposite side of the ideological spectrum (they hilariously blame a shootout that left police officers dead on "either far-right domestic terrorists or violent Zionists"), to their own embarrassment. Meanwhile, he makes a stark contrast between the mindset of a true US serviceman and a contractor in the battle zone to make money. For Swagger, Cruz and the other marines, it's about honor and country, while for Mick Bogier and his team, it's about a paycheck and marveling at how "cool" it is to kill people with sophisticated weaponry. Wanda Dombrowski, one of the drone operators, is haunted by the idea that she may have killed the wrong people, whereas Bogier and his men, while not ecstatic about killing innocents, write it off as the price of doing business. There is a difference, Hunter is saying, between a soldier and a killer.

Another thing I appreciate about Hunter's novels is how smart they are. The action hits hard, but his heroes are never just run-and-gun lunkheads. Bob Lee is a wily old fox, constantly outsmarting his enemies before out-shooting them. He has one particular bait-and-switch play here that I at first expected, then gave up on, only to marvel when it was used differently (and with a better payoff) than I had anticipated. People fear Bob the Nailer's eye and his trigger finger, but it's his mind that's the deadliest weapon of all.

I don't think Hunter's fans will be disappointed with Dead Zero. I try not to read too many books by the same author back to back, as I tend to get bored and yearn for something different (and, consequently, resenting a book I'd otherwise have liked), but right now I'd love nothing more than to pick up right where this novel leaves off with the next adventure in Ray Cruz' story, followed by the return of Bob Lee Swagger.

Quinn says

I really liked how this book started but the long drawn out story made this book just ok. I like the Swagger books because he is a bad ass killing machine. He was neither of those things in Dead Zero. The action sequences were lacking and the plot very predictable. I did like parts of this book but I want heroes not dead zeros. Overall, this book missed the target for me.

Dennis Larsen says

As with all of Mr. Hunter's books, I really enjoyed it. I can relate to the characters and they truly come to life throughout the story. Another winner from my favorite author.

Paul Pessolano says

Ray Cruz is a Marine sniper. He is on a mission to take out Ibrahim Zarzi (aka The Beheader").

Ray is in big trouble, in fact, so big that his Commanding Officer has asked everyone at headquarters to, "pray for Ray if you're religious. And if you're not religious, pray for Ray. That's an order".

Ray has been ambushed twice on this mission in Afghanistan just narrowly escaping with his life. Ray becomes very concerned when he discovers that the people trying to kill him are not Taliban or Al-Qaida, but contracted mercenaries. These mercenaries seem to know where Ray is at any given time and, Ray, not knowing who to trust, goes into hiding.

At the age of sixty-four, former Marine sniper, Bob Lee Swagger, is asked to help in finding Ray. It seems Ray has sent a message out that he will complete his mission and assassinate Zarzi during his trip to America. It seems that Zarzi has changed his stripes and has become an ally of the United States and that we are backing him for the Presidency of Afghanistan. Swagger is given the task of finding Ray before he completes his mission. Gotta love those Marines!!!!!!

Swagger makes contact with Ray and tries to bring him in. Ray is very reluctant to do this because he believes that Zarzi may have an ulterior motive, and Ray is still being hunted by the mercenaries. In fact, everytime Swagger makes contact with Ray, the mercenaries are able to locate Ray and make an attempt on his life.

The action is unrelenting and even continues after a major confrontation in the White House Rose Garden. Ray and the head of the mercenaries, Mick, face each other off with a surprising conclusion.

This may well be the best "Bob Lee Swagger" novel to date. A top notch read for the mystery fan and anyone with a military background.

A word of caution, military + Marines = profanity. Strong language is used throughout this book, but "heck", "darn", "fudge", and "son of a gun" would take away from the authenticity of the book.

Nick Brett says

I like Stephen Hunter's stuff, but I haven't read them all and tend to dip in and out and often not in sequence. But he has made Bob Lee Swagger an iconic character and done very well to keep rolling out stories on the fairly limited subject of snipers.

Here we have an older semi-retired Swagger being asked to help out the FBI in tracking down a top marine sniper that is almost a younger version of Swagger himself. The sniper has gone off the range to complete a compromised mission and in addition to the legitimate forces after him, there is also a very well informed kill squad. The plot and the characters work pretty well as Swagger starts to wonder who the good guys and the bad guys actually are. So it moves quickly and is a good page turner. That's the good news, the bad news is a slightly odd writing style that I don't remember from previous books. It's almost like the author is, at times, almost winking and having a private joke with the reader as part of the narrative. I found it annoying but not overly intrusive and the action was enough for me to be able to move on past it. But for me, it takes the book down from a potential four stars to a three star read.

Nate says

THIS is what I was wanting/hoping for from *I, Sniper*: a return to the twisty and deadly world that Bob Lee is supposed to inhabit, not all that samurai/NASCAR shit. I was a bit dubious of the inclusion of a new protagonist in Ray Cruz, but he turned out to be likable and ruthlessly efficient (if he doesn't have as much of those two qualities of Bob Lee, who can blame him? I only grow to like the old man more and more as the series progresses.) We have action here in the states and Afghanistan, and both are riveting, unendingly tense, and excellently written. I really loved the part where one of the characters ruminates, mid-firefight, how much it reminds him of the awe-inspiring shootout scene from *Heat* (if you like crime/action movies and haven't seen that one, you must.) If it can't hang with the classic canon of the first three Bob Lee novels, it's still damn close.

MisterLiberry Head says

I'm a longtime fan of the "Bob the Nailer" sniper novels--all of the way back to POINT OF IMPACT in 1993. Heck, I admit that I enjoyed the Mark Wahlberg movie, SHOOTER, which updated Bob Lee by several decades. Even more, I love the novels featuring Bob Lee's even tougher dad, the Medal of Honor winner from Blue Eye, Arkansas, "Mister Earl" Swagger. However, Hunter's novels have been spiraling downhill since he retired from the Washington Post. Maybe the time stolen from film criticism sharpened his novelist's edge? Anyway, this one had a truly ridiculous ending, not worthy of a Bob Lee adventure.
