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This faith-expanding thriller aims to revitalize awareness of unseen spiritual forces at work in our world.

The Assignment Details

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Author : Mark Andrew Olsen

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From Reader Review The Assignment for online ebook

Sarah says

This story has an array of characters but the main one is mysterious and, apparently, immortal. The "first person view" of history which Andre shares was very interesting to me. As this good vs. evil story progresses you find that no matter how long you live you can learn something new, something freeing.

Spring M says

One of my favorite authors. Superb premise and intelligent writing.

Anne says

This novel depicts the unseen spiritual forces in the world which seek to destroy all that is good. What if the restrainer mentioned in II Thessalonians is a man who has lived since the time of Christ and lives through the ages under many identities. A heartstopping beginning as the man comes to fight the evil in the world and enlists the help of a woman who has no idea who he is at first. A good fast paced thriller.

Glenda says

It's been a long time since I read this kind of Christian fiction. The action keeps building and have me wondering what's next. A good read!

JJ DeBenedictis says

I didn't finish this book. I got to page 93, whereupon some racist BS caused me to instantly go from, "Hohum, this book is a little dull," to "WTF? NOT OKAY."

So lemme explain. The book's prose is actually rather pleasant and lovely, but the plotting was a bit half-baked. Things would happen that didn't seem *quite* believable, usually due to a lack of foreshadowing but sometimes due to a disconnect with how reality actually functions.

For example, there's an early scene where a young priest enters his dorm room to find an old priest he's never met waiting for him. The old man starts talking. And the young man replies, but not with, "Who are you? Gadzooks, what are you doing in my room?" He just enters the conversation. He does not express any shock over the fact that a ninety-year-old man he's never met was sitting in the dark waiting for him when he got home from school.

Um. Most people would at least say "eek".

In another scene, the police are about to raid a house, and a guy in the house--who has literally just been dug

out of the bunker where he spent the last 60 years--simply talks his way past the police. No credentials, no badge, no uniform; with a few vague sentences, he convinces them he's a police officer too and walks away with all the men they came there to arrest trailing behind him.

And that's just not very freakin' believable, y'know?

The book also contains a lot of scenes and journal entries that were skip-worthy--they didn't advance the plot and often didn't even have enough information pertinent to the plot to be worth reading. Pretty writing, but dull and unnecessary.

Also, there's this hand-wavey nonsense about the Shroud of Turin, but hey, I read fantasy. I'm okay with hand-wavey nonsense. The author clearly needed the Shroud of Turin to be authentic, and so he hung a lampshade on the fact it isn't. I can forgive a bit of that.

In fact, most of my problems with this book were things I could forgive--things I'm generally okay with in small doses, and the book did keep them to small doses and it also had that nice prose quality. The novel didn't seem *bad*, just not terribly good, and I didn't have anything else to read, plus I didn't pay for this reading experience, so I didn't have any particular reason to get annoyed or to stop.

Until page 93. But first, let me tell you about page 92.

There was a scene where that character who was dug out of the bunker (he's immortal and knew Christ personally, by the way; the book's all about demons and priests) is on a beach kicking a heap of sand to practice his martial arts. The young priest mentioned earlier comes along, and the bunker-guy starts talking about the fighting skills he acquired on his trips to the "Orient". (Hey, he's a two-thousand-year-old who's been in a bunker since WWII. Of course he's old-fashioned.)

The young priest asks--in a way that definitely construes worry--"But you don't follow their beliefs, do you?"

And the bunker-guy assures him that no, he follows Christ's teachings.

Like I said, the book is all about demons and priests, so the character being genuinely religious is totally believable and appropriate. I don't have a problem with that. However, that one interaction on the beach kind of distracted my brain, as logic is wont to do.

I started vaguely wondering about the world-building of the novel. On one hand, it's only natural the book would posit that Christianity's beliefs are accurate, because the story is built upon them. Y'know--immortal guy, knew Jesus, now hunts demons? Yep; the story pretty much needs that framework in order to exist.

On the other hand, this one interaction really seemed to imply that the book thought it was important to not only state that Christian beliefs are true, but that all non-Christian beliefs are *false* (and that learning Asian martial arts might somehow infect you with non-Christian brain-cooties.)

It was only implied, but still. As my eyeballs scrolled idly over to page 93, that insult was kind of nagging at my brain. I really didn't like that note of ethnocentrism.

And in the very next scene, the first named character in the book who is definitely non-white--the scene mentions his "brown face" very specifically--is introduced. And it's clear from his name and his background that he's Muslim.

And what does he do? Well, first he gleefully pistol-whips an old man. Then he gets down on his knees and swears allegiance to the scary-bad demon currently possessing that old man. Then he asks the demon to tell

him who to kill. Oh, and he's a terrorist. *Of course.*

Like I said, this is when the novel got snapped shut as I went from mildly bored to flat-out angry.

Up to this point, the book had been annoying me in a gentle way by lightly flicking the alarm bells in my head. It wasn't until that scene, however, that I realized it was time to stop giving the story the benefit of the doubt.

It was racist, ethnocentric Christian propaganda.

And definitely not what I'm looking for when I get a fantasy book out of the library.

So this morning I flipped the book over and looked at the publisher. Bethanny Press. Yep--you can Google them: "Partnering with Christian publishers to transform the world for Jesus."

No one can claim I disliked this book because I'm anti-Christian, because I didn't know what the author's agenda was. I just recognized his bigotry when I saw it.

Jennifer Johnson says

One if the best CF books I've ever read. Such a great concept.

Henrietta Kawczak says

Unique vehicle mixing WWII death camps with Lazarus from the bible. Interesting perspective that was surprisingly enjoyable.

J

Glenn says

The story was okay, but I thought drawn out - could have been shorter... Too many flashbacks to the diaries...

Leia says

Really enjoyed this - fascinating mix of fiction, myth, and history. Couldn't put it down.

Faye says

This book was a little out there. Imagine that Lazarus (yes, from the Bible) never actually died again and has been alive all these years. I know...it sounds pretty cheesy but the story line actually opened up stories of his

"memories" of the years gone by and there was some interesting history to be had here. There is also a spiritual warfare element to this book (think Frank Peretti). Not every one's favourite thing, but I find it interesting. Enjoyed this book. I think the story line is highly, extremely unlikely but the historical detail and the spiritual struggles made it an enjoyable read.

Ferne says

A suspenseful thriller with a premise unlike any other I have ever read or even imagined. "For two thousand years he has wandered the shadows of humanity's blood-stained history, secretly carrying out an ancient mission." Consider that this man is Lazarus of Bethany that is on a mission given to him by God and until he succeeds he is unable to die and enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

I didn't know if I could read this book because I didn't know if I could imagine the premise even to read the novel. However, as I began reading the story, I felt compelled to continue reading. This is the author's first solo novel but he obviously knows the craft of writing as a screenwriter and has worked in collaboration with another author. This however was my first introduction to the writing of Mark Andrew Olsen. It is a novel of suspense that weaves past and present across a wide spectrum of locations beginning in Poland to Boston, MA, to France to Ireland to Rome to Jerusalem.

I'm glad that I finished reading the novel but I don't think it is a novel that I could recommend. I think that in whatever way one comes to find this novel, it is a very personal decision to read a novel of this content. It was once said that "Reading expands your mind and opens your world to a myriad of possibilities." [Specific author unknown.] This quote seems the best way that I can express my own choice to continue reading...to take me beyond my own thoughts, my own beliefs, and to consider other possibilities that might be different. It is definitely a unique portrayal of good vs. evil. I have learned through research about the author that he has written other novels but I do not anticipate reading another title.

Deb says

Plot Summary: What happens, When & Where, Central Characters, Major Conflicts[return]Father Stephen is the youngest and newest member of a secret Catholic society called the order of St. Lazare. They formed way back in the middle age to protect "The Restrainer". Stephen is skeptical about their mission at first, but when they excavate a crypt outside of a former Nazi concentration camp and find a man alive within the sealed chamber, he is forced to believe. The man is Lazarus, who after his resurrection was fated to not die again but to remain alive as The Restrainer who keeps the demonic forces at bay in their quest to overtake the world. Lazarus has lived through much, and so has his family, for he found a brief time of love and now his direct descendants have become targets in this supernatural wrestling match. Still when he seeks out his great-something granddaughter, he is surprised when she in return seeks him out and insists on joining him on his adventures. A game of cat and mouse ensues between him and his adversaries.[return][return][return][return][return][return][return]Style Characteristics: Pacing, clarity, structure, narrative devices, etc.[return]OK, the premise is pretty fantastic, so how well does Olsen do at creating a great thriller out of it? Olsen creates some memorable scenes, I especially recall how Lazarus can see into the Angelic world like when he is at a hospice and can see the ministering angels who are with the dying person. The story can be a bit confusing, as it jumps around from character to character and between places and times a lot. Part of it is told in the form of Lazarus's journal entries which, while interesting, sometimes don't add much to what is going on. Lazarus/Lazare was an interesting character, I didn't find his renaissance, man of the world persona meshing with the Biblical image, but maybe that's just me.

[return][return][return][return][return][return][return]How Good is it?[return]A page turner, though confusing and a little slow in spots.

Georgann says

Wow! I love it when I find a book I just love! Although I did skim through some of the pages of the hero's wearisome angst, it was otherwise an exciting and unexpected treasure!

JBradford says

The idea behind this novel is that Lazarus, having been brought back to life by Jesus, has continued to live. There is an implicit idea behind that concept that he has been given a reason to live, and it becomes clearer as the book goes on, but I won't spoil the plot by discussing it here. It turns out that he had revealed himself to the pope back in the middle ages, and the pope had created a special order of priests to help him. As the book opens, however, it seems that the priests have lost track of him and have not seen or heard from him for more than fifty years, but he is about to be found again and to renew his mission.

I suspect that a lot of people who take the Christian religion seriously will be turned off by this book, as it seems a bit apocryphal. I have a Catholic friend who would very likely take great objection to the idea that the Pope would create an order of priests who would act the way these priests do; on the other hand, the friend in question knows very little about history and cares less about it. I think the thing to do is to keep in mind that it is simply a novel, and might be considered an offshoot of science fiction. The author goes to some trouble to provide a scientific explanation as to how Lazarus can live this long. What's missing, to my mind, is an explanation of why he has been so ineffective in fulfilling his mission; I have to presume that someone with these capabilities could have done it more quickly! There are some things in the book that simply don't get explained, or at least don't get explained to my satisfaction.

Mark Olsen is listed as a full-time professional writer; in fact he is a professional writing graduate of Baylor University; the flyleaf indicates only this and another book as having been published, but I noted a few others listed on the Internet. He gives credit to Stephen Bransford for the concept of this book, it apparently having been an idea here that Bransford couldn't turn into a novel.

Charlie says

Fascinating and creative Biblical/ spiritual yarn, truly enjoyed. Feels like there should be a sequel, left some stories unfinished.
