

Keep your enemies close

Nov 15, 2013 | Community

By KARL KLOOSTER, Regional Editor of the McMinnville News-Register

Newberg novelist John Trudel publishes his third thriller



What if a powerful U.S. senator became obsessed with the belief that our nation was doomed to disaster unless the vast majority of senators and Congressional representatives were assassinated or incapacitated?

What if she devised a way to carry out that heinous objective, while simultaneously putting herself and a handpicked group of cohorts in a position to take over?

Megalomaniacal? Absolutely. Insane? Likely. Achievable? Maybe.

That's the central theme of Newberg author John Trudel's recently published near-future novel, "Soft Target" — his third in three years.

Trudel calls the genre "Cybertech" thrillers, after a fictitious Oregon company. He has already delivered on the theme with two chilling international thrillers — "God's House" and "Piracy Wars," both partially set in Oregon.

"God's House" sprawls out over an international stage, with Oregon serving as its home base and a miraculous power source owned by the widow of its recently murdered inventor as the coveted prize.

A disgraced CIA agent who failed to protect the inventor, a charismatic New Age guru who has enticed his grieving widow into her fold, along with a host of nefarious supporting players, put on a spine-tingling show as they compete in a deadly global game of winner take all.

Japan is the principal antagonist in "Piracy Wars," wherein America is so deeply indebted to the Land of the Rising Sun that a small army of Asian overseers roams with impunity from shore to not-so-shining-shore.

Out in the country's northwestern corner, these so-called "U.N. Peace Forces" are particularly interested in a purportedly unbreakable Internet encryption code invented by the owner of Oregon-based Cybertech.

Other determined foreign entities are simultaneously attempting to steal the technology, joining their Japanese competitors. One is even trying to protect it because he's already used it, but has to pay Cybertech for the privilege.

In "Soft Target," Cybertech is once again at the center of attention as a private contractor to the government tasked with creating an Internet-based communications network over which members of Congress can conduct cyber meetings without fear of being bugged by even the most sophisticated hackers.

The purpose is to make members of Congress invulnerable to simultaneous annihilation by eliminating the need for the federal government's legislative bodies to frequently gather within the confines of the U.S. Capitol Building.

Two plot lines run concurrently, enhancing the pace and excitement of the narrative.

In an act of high treason, the aforementioned U.S. Senator, Harriet Stiles, joins a tight-knit cabal of other congressional turncoats and conspires with the fictional fundamentalist Islamic nation of Bukhari.

Bukhari is in the final stages of perfecting a highly lethal, airborne bio-weapon. Their American co-conspirators will see to its dispersion in Washington, D.C., after they have received an adequate quantity of vaccine, also being developed by scientists in Bukhari, to inoculate themselves.

The autocratic president of Bukhari doesn't bat an eye at taking part in this wanton destruction of human life because it's always good to have friends in high places, especially ones who owe you something.

As for the other side of this evil alliance, the callous politicians and other government types who condone such an unspeakable act will be catapulted into places of immense power almost overnight.

The fate of the world's wealthiest and mightiest country hangs in the balance. Its best hope rests on the ability of a female NSA agent and a semi-retired Marine Corps general.

The NSA agent, Gerry Patton, is in charge of a black ops code named GIRL TALK, that is going nowhere until she suddenly finds herself under a new boss — USMC Gen. Mike Mickelson.

He dubs the project with a new code name, VINEYARD, and level of priority, Pull All Stops by direct order of POTUS. POTUS, of course, stands for president of the United States.

Believability is vital to any story, no matter how implausible. In that regard, Trudel puts flesh on his characters, elucidating their personalities, motives, actions and interactions within the context of unfolding, interconnected story threads.

And without giving it away, a surprise turn of events puts an exclamation point on the near universal agreement that very bad guys, and gals, deserve to get even worse than they give.

With more than a dozen books to his credit now, both fiction and non-fiction, Trudel's craftsmanship has been well-honed.

He'd like to secure publication by a major imprint, but whether or not that happens remains to be seen.

Self-publishing does have one big attraction as a fallback, in that you aren't subject to the constraints of editors. As a self-published author, Trudel can use his unfettered freedom of expression to interject his personal beliefs about American society and how it has arrived at its current position.

Among them are a repudiation of global warming and the assertion that animosity toward America among Middle East Islamic extremists was exacerbated by blunders on the part of presidents Carter and Obama. Any mention of the Bush administration's decade-long debacle in Iraq is omitted.

To his credit, the author does harshly criticize Bush II's secretary of defense, however, saying, "Many consider Rumsfeld to have been worse than McNamara." However, it would take some digging into historical records to fully comprehend the connection.

Not that the writer's version of First Amendment rights takes anything away from a well-paced and tightly plotted tale which includes insights into America's national intelligence and security infrastructure.

NSA, the nation's most powerful and opaque intelligence and counterintelligence organization, is at the forefront, as is the grim reality that in an open society such as ours we are all Soft Targets.

"Soft Target," "Privacy Wars" and "God's House" are all available from the author at www.johntrudel.com or through www.amazon.com.

And that's what I found out while OUT and ABOUT — examining everything with a microscope for fear a lethal microorganism could be lurking behind any lamp post.

Karl Klooster can be reached by e-mail at <mailto:kklooster@newsregister.com> or by phone at 503-687-1227.

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