

Guarding Savage

Dave Edlund

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Dave Edlund's *Guarding Savage* is a near-perfect international thriller that includes everything from a Sino-American naval war to the history of Japanese atrocities in World War II-era China. At its core is an important message: diplomacy and peace are always a better option than conflict.

Peter Savage rescues a beautiful Bruneian woman from capture, only for her to be snatched soon after by mysterious thugs. Peter and Robert, the woman's bodyguard, are on the case. At the same time, two oil ships launch rockets at American and Japanese naval vessels in the South China Sea. The two stories come together as Savage and the US government uncover a conspiracy involving Chinese nationals, the Sultanate of Brunei, and old historical wounds.

Fast-paced and two-fisted, this no-frills potboiler accomplishes all it sets out to do. There is action on almost every page, all while holding the main story lines in the center. Peter Savage is an everyman through whom explosive political possibilities are explored, especially how China represents a threat to the American status quo in East Asia.

The prologue, which displays in miniature the horrific crimes committed by the Imperial Japanese Army in Chinese cities like Nanking and Shanghai, gets lost and is forgotten halfway through the narrative. The majority of the novel takes place in the present day, so it is easy to overlook the events of January 4, 1938. Still, Edlund's thriller is well stocked with fascinating characters, plot twists, and plenty of insight into current foreign relations between the United States, its Asia allies, and China.

Guarding Savage is a novel made for the precarious present, when the threat of a Sino-American confrontation remains very real.

BENJAMIN WELTON (November/December 2018)

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