

The Bomb Maker's Apprentice

Robert Sandilands

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The Bomb Maker's Apprentice is a high octane thriller that follows a man who's trying to avenge his brother.

Robert Sandilands's thriller *The Bomb Maker's Apprentice* dramatizes a disturbing criminal organization.

When Richard's brother Corrie goes missing while he's working with a drug dealing club owner, Cecil, Barton joins the criminal organization responsible for Corrie's disappearance, hoping to suss out information. After weeks of training, he rises in the ranks of the organization, which is run by merciless Randell. Barton's investigations draw on his experiences in the army, but he's also aided by Eva, who works for Randell and has a mysterious history. Barton's goal becomes taking down the organization from the inside.

Beginning in media res and providing too little background information, the book follows Barton's training period in the organization before a discussion of his plan with his grieving parents. After the book establishes Barton's role and objective, it reveals other details—such as that Barton, while in his trial period, lived with Damston, who acts as his handler and has worked for Randell for ten years. Some of these details are necessary to the book's progression, but their delayed disclosure muddles the story.

The narrative alternates between perspectives, including Barton's, Damston's, and Cecil's. Their thoughts contribute to intriguing subplots and show intimate aspects of their personalities. In some cases, this intensifies the book's drama, as when Cecil is exposed for mistreating his boyfriend, cementing his status as a villain. But there are distorting attributions of negative character traits to people's ethnic backgrounds and sizes that undermine this work, too (Cecil is referenced negatively as "the little black man"; Randell is obese and in a wheelchair, eliciting other characters' disgust).

Barton is a natural hero, developed in terms of his military skills and his compassion for others. Eva begins as an obstacle for him, since she is entrenched in the organization, but as their attraction grows, so too does the complexity of their relationship: they both use each other for personal gain. Soon, their vulnerability develops into trust, and their growing relationship holds interest.

The prose is expressive and precise, particularly in action scenes: Barton and Damston "press...their backs against the building ... side-step[ping] all the way, keeping tight to the wall." Each chapter contains purposeful action, including coordinated gunfights and dramatic arguments. And the explosive ending is faithful to the thriller tropes that came before it: there's hope that the book's villain's will face justice.

Dropping teasers for a sequel, *The Bomb Maker's Apprentice* is a high octane thriller that follows a man who's trying to avenge his brother.

AIMEE JODOIN (June 10, 2022)

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