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The U.S. aircraft carrier patrolling the Western Pacific Ocean is severely damaged by a surprise salvo of cruise missiles. While the Russian government officially apologizes, claiming it was the result of fire control accident during a training exercise, it was instead a calculated provocation. With the U.S. Pacific fleet already severely under strength, the Russian President decides that the US response is a clear indication of their weakness, militarily and politically, and initiates a bold plan.

Political unrest is spreading through the Eastern European states. The Russian Northern Fleet moves swiftly in the Mediterranean Sea, the Russian army is moving west to the border, and Russian Baltic and Black Sea Fleets are mobilized. In one bold strike, the Russian army moves to reoccupy a large number of the industrialized areas of the former USSR, while blockading the vital sea passages through which the world's oil and natural gas transit. To make matters worse, Russia's Special Forces have wired every major oil and natural gas pipeline with explosives. If the U.S. makes one move to thwart Russia, they'll destroy them all. The U.S. is risking disaster if it acts, but the alternative is quite possibly worse. Torn between the unthinkable and the impossible, the only possible move?to launch an attack on all fronts, simultaneously.

Blackmail Details

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Shaun says

After reading Empire Rising, Rick Campbell became a must-buy author for me. I've since read Ice Station Nautilus (book 3) and Trident Deception (book 1). So I splurged and bought this book hardcover. But after reading a third of it, I'm making it down as Did Not Finish.

As with Ice Station, the first half of the book is spent setting everything up... And after Nautilus, I didn't have the patience. Don't mistake me, I thought the 2nd half of Nautilus was well worth the wait, but this one, I lost interest in.

What killed the book for me was it spent so much time setting up Russia invading Ukraine and Lithuania, and it was too similar to another book I read, "War With Russia". The last two Clive Cussler books I read, Odessa Sea and Emperor's Revenge, also deal with Russia and Ukraine. So I found the plot to be highly derivative. To me, Campbell is at his best in writing about submarine warfare. This is why Nautilus was IMO his best work, esp the second half. It was very much a duel between submarines and he nailed it. In this book, it's more about missile batteries, infantry companies, and even the few submarine scenes weren't about sub vs sub action, but merely the sub moving the SEAL team into position. The sub scenes themselves were mundane, describing surfacing, going through Suez Canal, and submerging. So... Not only was the first third of the book spent getting everything into place, but it was mostly stuff going on on the surface. Campbell is best describing subs, and should stick mostly there, where his knowledge can shine.

Also a factor in me giving up on it... I'm just tired of Russia. I hoped from early in the book that Christine and the Russian president would kinda form a Montague and Capulet relationship, a sort of forbidden romance and now there's this tide of events and what would they be willing to sacrifice, each other or their country... But unfortunately it didn't materialize.

So... Trident I didn't like so much, Empire I thought had the best pacing, Nautilus the second half was Campbell hitting full stride. Blackmail to me was a dud. Maybe it was rushed. Maybe it was poorly planned. The end of the book hints at the plot for a next book. But like I said, I'm tired of Russia. And I think the Americans would be too. I think the SECOND they step over the line, the US would go all guns blazing on them. For them to continue to pussyfoot with Russia at this point is naive. Just nuke em already cuz they'll never learn.

3 no 7 says

"Blackmail" is the fourth book in Rick Campbell's series of contemporary military thrillers. It is not necessary to have read the other books in the series, but readers who enjoy "Blackmail" will certainly want to read the previous books.

A Russian submarine encounters an American warship in the Pacific, and attacks. "We aren't at war with the United States, but this might start one." And so it begins.

Something has gone terribly wrong. The Russians apologize and say it was a malfunction. We know they are lying right from the start, but why? Why did they attack and why that ship? Political and economic turmoil are spreading across Europe and even threaten the United States. Disaster looms on every side; every action has an equally unpleasant response.

The action is fast-paced, and the events are so current that they could have been pulled from today's newspapers. It is a political thrill ride from start to finish. The characters are complex, and the accurate, detailed descriptions put the reader right in the middle of everything.

"Blackmail" starts with a convenient list of characters to facilitate identifying the important players in each arena. In addition, each chapter begins with a notation of the location as the action shifts from ship to shore and country to country.

This is not the kind of book that I usually read, but when I saw the description, I was intrigued. Since I am not accustomed to reading books in this category, I gave it three stars, but I am sure that readers who are more familiar with this genre will give it five stars since it kept even me on the edge of my seat. I received a copy of "Blackmail" from St. Martin's Press, and NetGalley in exchange for my truthful review. I really enjoyed reading something out of my comfort zone.

Neil says

Overall, I enjoyed reading this book. I think the author does a "better job" when the scenario is smaller in scope and not so broad. The first half or so of the book is spent building up to the "climax" and then the last half of the book is the climax. It was exciting in parts, it was captivating in parts; he came up with some "solutions" and scenarios I do not recall having read before, which made elements of the story quite unique. At the same time, it felt "rushed" and that it was wrapped up a bit too neat - a little too "conveniently" (for lack of a better way to put it).

The entire concept (view spoiler) was a great concept (and, hence, the title). On the one hand, though, it does kind of remind me of the 1980s TV mini-series "World War III" (view spoiler).

The character development was okay; the "main" character probably had the most development. (view spoiler) I cannot say that I ever came to really have any "emotional attachment" to or investment with any of the characters, though.

(view spoiler)

(view spoiler)

I do like how he is trying to keep the novels accurate with each other (accurate is probably not the right word; maybe trying to maintain the continuity of his storyline?). The US Navy is still trying to recover from the short war with China, and some elements from the beginning of the book are the result of the events in the third book in the Arctic Circle. The events of this book will make the next one interesting in terms of seeing how the United States handles (is able to handle) future "world crises."

I did enjoy the book. (view spoiler) It was a fast read, and parts of it did have me on the edge of my seat. I am glad that I read it.

Ed says

Strong characters in the Trident Deception series return in book 4 facing a major international threat from a resurgent Russia. The President of Russia banks on the US and NATO allies backing down from it's expansionist invasions of Lithuania and Eastern Ukraine. He guesses wrong resulting in a major naval battle between the US and Russian navies. My only complaint with this book and the series in general are the author's unnecessarily long technical descriptions of weapon systems and Navy/submarine SOP's. Reading long military tech descriptions bog down an otherwise entertaining military thriller.

V.madhusudan says

While the books starts off very nicely, it loses plot towards the end. It appears as if there was an urgency to finish the book and in the process, the enemy i.e Russia is shown to be dumb in so far as their internal security process and external intelligence gathering is concerned.

No one leaves a high value target unguarded like the designer of the detonator and the defence minister's villa.

HUman intelligence has been totally ignored. It has been assumed that it is a cake walk for USA to feed wrong information to the Russian & Indian satellites and moving four carrier groups in to the Indian Ocean & Arabian Sea, and nobody gets to know about it.

David Pugliese says

I read this book without reading the other books in the series. This is because my wife bought it for me when I told her to buy me a war book. I did not know it was a part of a series until the very end. But it was enjoyable all on its own.

It moves very quickly and does a good job building the tension between the international powers at play. The story line with Christine was great and kept me riveted. However when it came to the actual battle scenes I was so lost with the submarine jargon. He even said he dumbed it down for the average reader but I still only got the slightest gist of what was happening in those scenes. But that's my only complaint. It was an enjoyable read and I would like to read the rest in the series.

Deborah Gray says

The premise of entitled Russian invasion and seizure of adjoining countries and an all out war between Russia and the US seems chillingly prescient in light of current geopolitical affairs. I have read all of Campbell's book to date and I continue to be impressed with not only the depth of knowledge of myriad technical details but the breadth of his grasp of the inner workings, and descriptive details, of other governments around the world. I do enjoy the tactical details and the suspense of the battles, but also enjoy some character development and I felt the author fleshed out the main players in this novel a little more and gave their relationships a three dimensional feel. This is a fast paced story that continues to build a stellar reputation for this author and cements his place among the elite of the international thriller genre.

Todd Buegler says

The plot of this book should have been the most interesting to me. While it involved multiple nations all interacting for their own interests, thus it seemed the most realistic, it also had a smaller scope, focusing directly on the conflict in US/Russian relations.

But the story, for some reason, failed to draw me in like his previous books had, at least until the final third of the book. I'm not sure why...but I just didn't care as much about the story.

And while I'm glad that Rick Campbell has included a strong female character in a strong leadership role, I'm not a fan of the way that her sexuality becomes such a strong element of the story. This is not the case for his male characters.

I'll keep reading Rick Campbell's books, and I will consider my reaction to this book a bit of an anomaly, but I will continue to pay attention.

Tom Mahan says

Oh to be 15 again. If I were 14 or 15 again I would be all over this book, a nonstop war book so filled with action that a conventional war with two superpowers plus, would only take a couple of weeks or so. Gee we must have been doing something wrong in all our previous wars, they seemed to take years. And lets not forget our fearless national security advisor, a beautiful woman (of course) who kills the russian defense minister and the head of the SVR (was KGB) with her bare hands, and of course escapes russia with ease. This would make a great Saturday morning tv show, but only if it were an hour or less. That being said, if you have a 13-15yo boy, this book would make a great Christmass gift. You're welcome.

Wendy says

“Blackmail” the fourth book in the “Trident Deception” series opens with a Russian submarine attack on the USS aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt. With damage to one of the already depleted carriers in the U.S. Pacific fleet after their war with the Chinese, the carrier heads to port, out-of- commission for six months. In a surprising apology the Russian President blames the accident on a misfire during a training exercise although the President and his advisers suspect something more sinister being planned.

With the Russians plagued with problems in their economy, President Kalinin’s popularity sliding before the election, this is the first step in their bold plan to reoccupy the Baltic States, part of the former USSR while blockading the world’s oil and natural gas transports to stop NATO interference. Increasing the threat Russia Special Forces have wired explosives into the oil and natural pipelines that seem impossible to defuse and they will detonate if provoked.

In a fast-paced and action-packed military thrill-ride, the world draws closer to war as NATO allies’ debate

about intervening when the Russians take Lithuania and the Ukraine, the U.S. searches for a way to defuse the bombs, and the Russian ambassador negotiates support from China and India. As the Russian plot thickens Christine O'Connor the presidential national security adviser in a gripping subplot is headed to Moscow to negotiate the terms governing nuclear weapons only to later become embroiled in plan to neutralize the bombs on the pipelines by killing the Russian Defense Minister.

Intensity and suspense quickly escalate with the extraction of a Russian scientist by a US Special Ops team; the tension in the Strait of Hormuz; and Christine's meetings with Chinese President Xiang, and her clash with the Russian SVG Director. With twists and turns in a smoothly flowing plot with quick short chapters that make the clash of wills and engagement of forces realistic, the excitement and tension mounts as the story explodes in a violent confrontation on land and sea.

With a large array of characters one of the personalities that stands out is Christine O'Connor a smart, honest and driven adviser to the President who's constantly followed by trouble. With little time for a social life, she finds herself pursued by the Russian President and his Defense Minister while yearning for a Seal she once loved and lost. But the most chilling personality is that of Semyon Gorev the Director of the SVG who's intimidating, domineering and cruel in the cat and mouse game he likes to play with Christine.

As always, I thoroughly enjoyed Rick Campbell's fourth novel in the Trident Deception series. Well-written and very credible, I highly recommend it to those that like a great military thriller.

Read Ng says

The events in this book closely follow the previous books. It can be read independently of the other books, but you might lose some character continuity.

America has emerged from the war with China, bloodied, but not completely beaten. The shooting war continues with a new opponent and we get to go along for the ride.

The battle sequences and timing are very reminiscent of Tom Clancy. This book is less about the submarine service than the previous books and more about other aspects of war and government betrayals. We also find our heroine O'Conner playing an increasingly larger role in each and every book. She is a strong and resourceful character. I was getting to feel it was a bit over the top, but in reflection, she is just the badass heroine I have been missing for a while. I will look forward to the next in this series.

Add this to your reading list and have a GoodReads.

Tad says

A surprise Russian attack on a U.S. aircraft carrier in the Pacific leaves the already understrength fleet vulnerable. The Russians apologize for the "accident", but it turns out the attack was only the opening salvo in a bold Russian plan to create a buffer zone along its border with Europe. Blackmail by Rick Campbell plays out this scenario in chilling detail. Whether a weakened U.S. fleet has the ability and the appetite to stand up to Russian aggression and whether they can do so without plunging the world into a new war is the question in Campbell's exciting military techno-thriller.

The Russian president and military is betting that the United States does not have the appetite for further conflict after its recent battle with China, detailed in an earlier book. Blockading sea access to world oil supplies and booby-trapping major gas and oil pipelines serve as further threat to keep Western Europe and NATO forces from risking a response. The U.S. chooses an aggressive response attacking on multiple fronts simultaneously. If it doesn't go exactly according to plan, the risk could be plunging the world into economic chaos and a new world war.

The action bounces among several locations from the presidencies in Washington and Moscow to locations on board submarines and aircraft carriers. National Security Advisor Christine O'Connor plays a central role both for her savvy and for the regard in which she is held by top leaders in the Russian administration.

The early part of the book is spent in setting up the conflict to come, with diplomacy as well as covert missions to achieve critical objectives. Once these pieces are maneuvered into place, the action takes off with compelling naval battle scenes as well as some up close and personal encounters. Campbell does a good job of staging a large military engagement with high speed action and a lot of moving pieces. The scale of the battle robs it of some of its intimacy. Casualties are a little less impactful without more of a personal connection to the people involved. Some of the political calculations also strain credulity, but overall this is a solid military thriller sure to please fans of Campbell's previous work as well as fans of the genre in general.

The audio version is narrated by Michael Kramer. Kramer does a solid job here, particularly with the accents making it easy to distinguish when switching between Russian and American perspectives. The pacing is generally good, but long passages describing weapon systems and tactics occasionally run on, particularly in audio version. It is a quick listen with plenty of action.

I was fortunate to receive a copy of this book and the audio from the publisher.

Samuel says

I thank Netgallery and the Publisher for providing the electronic review copy.

Blackmail is the fourth military thriller by long serving US Navy Veteran Rick Campbell. Written in the grand speculative fiction tradition of Clancy and Bond, Blackmail paints a picture of how the third world war could come to pass.

Picking a starting point in the current Cold War 2.0 between a nationalist Russia and the free world, the author then unfolds an ingenious conspiracy that the Russian military and espionage establishment seek to use in order to gain complete and utter world domination. Troops are mobilized, Russian spies provoke chaos within their enemies and most unexpectedly, the most critical oil and gas pipelines on earth, are subject to a hostile takeover like nothing you've ever seen before.

Standing in the Russian federation's way, is the United States Armed Forces and Christine O'Connor, the national security adviser who is tasked with coming up with a suitable strategy to defeat the old enemy. Campbell has developed his skills as a writer marvellously since the rough, but promising start in The Trident deception.

With a crisp, fasted paced writing style, insider knowledge on modern conventional warfare, a rock hard

grasp on the geopolitical realities facing the world and fully mastering the delicate task of characterization and character development, *Blackmail* is the culmination of a writer who has hit his stride and has reached the start of his great things period. Now the king of the naval military thriller sub – genre, the author is set for whatever awaits him and his work, and I wait with bated breath to see the next act in the saga he's kicked off in this story.

David says

Rick Campbell's best offering yet. I've liked his previous works, but this is the best yet. Difficult to put down, with multiple plots unfolding simultaneously. Decent character development, and a knowledge of submarines unmatched by any other fiction writer.

The book does a good job of following the alternate history laid down in the previous books, and anticipating likely reactions to it. The Deus Ex Machina and most of the Mary Sue issues in some previous works are gone. Pick up this book, and you'll find a real page-turner that you won't want to set down.

Full disclosure: I am a Naval Academy classmate of the author and a named character in the book.

Zack Barnes says

Originally posted on A to Z Book Reviews.

Retired submarine commander Rick Campbell's naval thriller series have been repeatedly compared to Tom Clancy, and for good reason. Campbell's fourth installment, *Blackmail*, is a thrilling story pulled straight from the headlines.

In *Blackmail*, we find America's navy struggling after a prolonged war with China. While America's navy is rebuilding, Russian President Yuri Kalinin sees an opportunity for Russia to continue to grow their dominance both by sea and by land. A Russian submarine fires on an American aircraft carrier in the western Pacific ocean and claims it was an accident from a training exercise. America accepts Russia's apologies for the attack. Seeing that America is still weakened by previous wars, Russia greenlights their master plan to gain power. America knows from the start that Russia is up to something, and that becomes clearer when Russia invades Ukraine.

America tries to get NATO to come to the aid of Ukraine and react to Russia's effort to annex Ukraine. Russia successfully blackmails the NATO countries by threatening to blow up gas and oil pipelines throughout the world. If successfully detonated, countries would be devastated and economies would come to a crashing halt. With the blackmail in place, NATO votes not to start a conflict with Russia, so America goes in alone. To stop an all out attack from the stronger Russian navy, America must attack with all their might all at one time.

Christine O'Connor, the national security advisor, serves as the fantastic tough-as-nails lead character in the series. Along with O'Connor, Campbell composes an ensemble cast that includes something for every reader. O'Connor and the President are great characters for those who love political thrillers. The Navy commanders and SEAL team operatives are perfect for readers who love a little more military action.

The realism portrayed in these books comes from real life experiences. Campbell's life-long career makes these books shine. He is at his prime with Blackmail, and his thrillers are a must read for those who enjoy political and military thrillers. He uses modern day politics to set the stage in his books, and that's what makes his books so appealing. You will finish his books and think, "Could this happen in the next few years?"

I finished all four of his books in just a few months, and I would highly suggest you start with the first book in the series. You'll be hooked right away.
