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### Insidious Deception, Alan Moss (Review)

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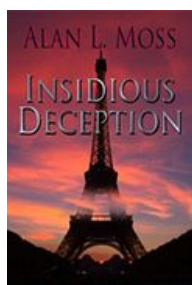
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## ***Insidious Deception***

**By:** Alan L. Moss

*Insidious Deception*. Casper, WY: Whiskey Creek Press, 2013. 460 pp. Pbk: \$8.94. ISBN: 978-1611605488. Ebk: \$4.99. 547 KB.

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### ***Review by***

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This is a thriller, not an academic book. It is interesting to academics working on Middle Eastern studies only insofar as it pertains to issues of energy development and conflict resolution in the region. It was published by an amateur author through what appears to be a vanity press, and if we are to judge it by the standards of such works, it is above average. It is competently organized, its characters have reasonably plausible motivations, and it is free of grammatical and spelling errors. It also has a thought-provoking take on conflict resolution and its vulnerability to the efforts of those who profit from conflict to derail or subvert the process.

This is not to say that it is a good novel. It is not. While it retains the features of the genre, it fails to assemble its parts into a compelling sum. Moss has the novice fiction writer's habit of having a character say a line, then providing a paragraph of background prose explaining why that character would say such a thing. The novelist's mantra of "Show, don't tell" is largely ignored throughout the text. Characters mostly exist to fulfill structural functions within the story rather than as psychologically realistic individuals. The prose, while competent, does not sing, nor does it reflect its subject matter or the themes of the novel.

Let us take a brief example. In the initial chapters, the young American man who is to become one of the protagonists is making extra money working as a deckhand on a luxury yacht where the corporate conspirators meet to hatch their plot. After the trip, he looks up the Italian woman who had lived in his house in the States as an exchange student years before: she is now an adult, remembers him quite fondly, and enthusiastically accepts his proposal to stow away on the yacht as it deadheads back whence it came. But on the voyage, the yacht explodes and sinks, presumably because the conspirators wish to erase any hint they ever met. The young woman dies; the young man's grief catalyzes his quest for revenge. This is not an unreasonable plot device for a thriller; but it's poorly executed. Moss describes the young woman entirely as a set of appealing physical attributes, not as a human with subjectivity; before the explosion, the evidence left behind by the conspirators is introduced very clumsily; after the explosion, the woman whose physical features have been so lovingly described is tossed away like a broken doll. A better thriller would give the woman a personality, would have the young man curious and wary about the passengers who just left (or enthusiastic about how great hobnobbing with the rich was), would have the young woman survive and then have the two young people evolve a relationship as they explore the conspiracy. But none of this occurs.

Moss has written a text that fits the description of "thriller," but is really something more like the treatment for a late-night movie on basic cable. It's a story, but not much of a novel. Academics who enjoy thrillers as a pastime might pick it up for airplane or before-bed reading, but there is a wide selection of much better material readily available.

