



Zero Sum

Barry Eisler

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Returning to Tokyo in 1982 after a decade of mercenary work in the Philippines, a young John Rain learns that the killing business is now controlled by Victor, a half-Russian, half-Japanese sociopath who has ruthlessly eliminated all potential challengers. Victor gives Rain a choice: kill a government minister or die a grisly death. But the best route to the minister is through his gorgeous Italian wife, Maria, a route that puts Rain on a collision course not only with Victor but with the shadowy forces behind the Russian's rise to dominance—and the longings of Rain's own conflicted heart.

It's a battle between kingpin and newcomer, master and apprentice, a zero-sum contest that can only end with one man dead and the other the world's foremost assassin.

Zero Sum Details

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Skip says

Assassin John Rain is back in Tokyo, after spending many years hiding out in the Philippines. However, the landscape has changed and his services are not needed as a half Japanese-half Russian sociopath named Victor, has a monopoly on local killings. John asks for an introduction because he needs work, and has to earn his way into Victor's good graces at his introductory meeting. He is given an assignment to kill a member of the Japanese Diet or be killed. While he bides his time, Rain assembles his friends and resources to arrange a showdown with Victor, but along the way is able to determine that there are American forces at work too. Rain also manages to fall for his victim's attractive Italian wife. Taut plot, with Eisler's knowledge of Tokyo and espionage showing as always.

Andrew Smith says

A chronological reading of John Rain's life would have you coming to this book after *A Graveyard of Memories* and before *A Clean Kill in Tokyo* (aka Rain Fall). *Graveyard* was written as a prequel in 2014 and is set in 1972, it deals with his early life as a CIA bagman and his conversion to novice assassin. This is a second prequel novel and it's set in 1982, where it picks up John's life once more after he returned to Tokyo following ten years of fighting as a mercenary in the Philippines. It shows how Rain began to hone his skills and gain a better understanding of how to read people and situations – in other words, how he became a better killer. Of course, there's a good deal more to it than that but the evolution of Rain's professional capabilities are at the heart of this story.

Keen to earn some money he contacts an old friend, only to find that the murder-for-money game has now been monopolised by a half-Japanese psycho called Victor. Rain decides to seek him out with the aim of getting hired, and after an initiation (of sorts) he's set to work. You know that John has his sights on the big game here – to replace Victor- but it's not going to be easy. Victor is careful and nasty, a fearsome foe.

The basic plot is a simple one, but there's a complex story building in the background and if I'm honest this element was rather too convoluted for my tastes. However, there is a series of brilliantly choreographed fight scenes with the violence being both brutal and graphic. There is love interest too, with a married woman, some years older than Rain, helping him to sharpen his bedroom skills.

It's a worthy addition to a series which continues to draw me as much for the complexity of the main character – at once a ruthless killer but also a thoughtful lover of Japanese culture, jazz music and fine malt whiskey – as for the excitement and pace of the action sequences. I'm certainly looking forward to more from John Rain. Eisler has said that there's room for one more prequel, to be set in 1992 (note: he wrote and set *Clean Kill* in 2002, at which point Rain was already an accomplished expert in his field), but my hope is that this might also be followed by a continuance of the series set in real time. Fingers crossed!

Michael says

Quite a satisfying espionage thriller. The hero of a series I am breaking into, John Rain, is a bit disreputable in his current occupation of a soldier-spy for hire. But he appreciates it when the people he has to kill are bad guys. He may engage in adultery to fulfill his love life, but his desire burns true. In the face of monstrous

enemies with nefarious plans for more and more power, Rain gains our permission to grow the body count, dodge death in many forms, while achieving some personal justice and good loving along the way.

We catch up with Rain as he returns to Tokyo in 1982 after a decade of mercenary work in the Philippines, where his efforts on behalf of rebel forces leaves him painted in a corner. An old comrade-in-arms, now an executive for a powerful company with many fingers in the political landscape, refers him for mercenary work to Victor. From all their macho moves and mental wrestling with each other during his job interview, this half-Japanese Russian becomes a fiendish adversary for Rain.

In the few years since Victor arrived from Russia he has somehow managed to make a monopoly out of all the contract killing in the city. The corporate powers, political parties, and yakuza all play ball with this arrangement. Rain wants to figure out what silent international partners are behind Victor's success and find a way to get his friend and his company out from under Victor's thumb. Rain goes through the motions of taking on the job of killing a candidate for prime minister, a race opened up due to the recent death of the incumbent, reportedly from a heart attack. Under guise of planning his job, he works hard to sort out his enemies' intentions and resources. His approach to scoping out the candidate he's supposed to hit involves developing an undercover relationship with his wife, Maria, a socialite and museum manager.

Something sparks the romance effect, and soon they are spending a lot of time together. His life is so tough, I suppose we must forgive him for violating the rule of not getting involved with the marks in *The Game* (like we always did for James Bond) While sneaking about town they are attacked by skilled assassins. But our boy is better. For the rest of the book, our hero is desperately pressed to figure out whether their target was her or him and who put the contract out. Some of the candidates include Victor himself, the yakuza, the CIA, a right-wing political faction in Japan, or some combination of the above.

Rain's affinity for Tokyo appears to be a channel for the author to express his own history with and love for the city with great atmospherics in the narrative on its social rituals, fashions, foods, gardens, temples, bars, and clubs. I liked the sense of place in this tale. I also liked Rain's character being a cool combination of brain and brawn. He's not quite the superman package of Trevanian's *Hel*, brilliant at all martial arts and deeply wise as a Zen-master. Still, he has significant ju-ju from being a star in the Special Forces and their teamwork with the CIA in the Vietnam War, his growing up in Japan, and a master at swordplay and at harnessing mindfulness to effective crisis response and offensive combat. It all adds up to a fun ride, an energizing mind-twister, and pleasing celebration of old tropes in new bottles.

This book was provided by the publisher for review through the Netgalley program. Thanks for Larry for recommending it in his terrific review.

Debra says

4.5 stars

I was so excited when I saw that there was going to be another book in the John Rain series. I was first introduced to Barry Eisler's John Rain series years ago through a site called bzzagent. I was selected to read a book and give my honest opinion. That book was the 4th in the series (*Killing Rain* now known as *Redemption Games*). I was hooked!!! I quickly read the first three books in the series and have been a Barry Eisler (and John Rain!) fan ever since. I have read Eisler's other books as well but the John Rain series remains my favorite! Eisler never disappoints - the action is fast, the plot moves at a great speed and there will be intrigue, mystery, fighting, sex, and plot twists along the way. It is no wonder that he has such a huge fan base. I find Eisler's books to be intelligent, fun, dark, and suspenseful.

In this book, a young John Rain has returned to Tokyo after spending a decade in the Philippines working as a mercenary. The year is 1982 and Rain has been given the task of eliminating/killing a Japanese politician by a man named Victor. Victor is half Japanese- half Russian thug who controls the "killing" business in Tokyo. But is Victor really in charge or is someone controlling him? As Rain goes about completing his task, the bodies begin to pile up and Rain begins a relationship with the politician's wife.

Rain relies on some friends along the way to fill in some background info as he determines his best course of action. Speaking of action, there is a lot of it in this book. I have always enjoyed the fight scenes. They are really vivid. The Author has spent time in Japan, has a covert position with the CIA, and has martial arts experience. It is no wonder that his action and story lines feel real, descriptive and vivid.

This book is a prequel and does a good job showing how John Rain became an assassin. It also works well as a stand alone book but I think hard core Rain/Eisler fans will especially appreciate this book! This book will get your heart pumping and your fingers turning the page.

I received a copy of this book from Thomas and Mercer and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

See more of my reviews at www.openbookpost.com

Ed says

In his early thirties, freelance assassin John Rain returns to Tokyo after ten years in the Philippines. He inadvertently becomes involved with Victor, a Russian/Japanese thug with a monopoly on contract killing in Tokyo. Rain quickly understands he needs to eliminate Victor but his plan gets complicated by possible CIA involvement in the future direction of post war Japan. Unfortunately for me, Rain's long detailed monologues and drawn out trade-craft segments slowed the pace in what is otherwise a solid thriller. Maybe it's my lack of literary patience but my idea of a 4 or 5 star thriller should be 80% action and 20% atmosphere, character studies, romance, amusing anecdotes, etc.

David Highton says

A new Rain novel, set early in his assassin career, where he is less experienced, prone to self-doubt and not as confident as in the novels set later. Still, he gets the job done.

Nancy Cook Lauer says

If you want a fast-paced, easy-reading, fairly mindless book filled with lots of violence and leavened with a little sex, this is for you. A hired killer is hunting people in Tokyo, some of whom are hunting him too. I really enjoyed what seem to be well-researched and realistic depictions of locale and characters.

Sandy says

I've read all the John Rain books & "Graveyard of Memories" remains one of my favourite books of the last

few years. Like that one, this features an older, wiser Rain reliving an episode from the beginning of his career as a hitman.

It's 1982 & Rain has just returned to Tokyo looking for work. When he gets in touch with old contact & friend Miyamoto, it's immediately clear things have changed. Miyamoto is now an important man in the government & in Rain's absence has been forced to use a violent & sociopathic half-Russian named Victor Karkov. To the young & cocky Rain the solution is obvious.....he'll get himself hired on to Karkov's crew & kill him. Miyamoto will be out from under his thumb & free to send any jobs Rain's way. Simple, right? Well.....

Eisler is a gifted writer & one of the things he excels at is creating plots that resemble an iceberg. On the surface is a basic premise, a single act that sets it all in motion. But as the chapters fly by, the complexity of the story becomes apparent as the scope of what was hidden is gradually revealed. In this case, there are many more players than Rain or Miyamoto could have known. And the people actually pulling all the strings make for a wry commentary on US-Japanese relations.

That's all I'll say about the plot. It's much better if you go in blind & stumble along with the MC's. What has always made this series stand out is the literary style of prose & fully realized characters. Yes, there is graphic violence. But as you spend time with Rain & learn his back story he only becomes more compelling & you begin to care for this damaged man.

Rain is the product of a Japanese father & American mother. As a child, he grew up in both countries but was fully accepted by neither. His "gift" was honed by military tours in Viet Nam & it was there he finally found a place to fit in. But a lifetime of slights has left its mark & you sense that little boy who was shunned by 2 cultures is never far below the surface. At this point, he's only beginning to think about long term repercussions & the things he will never have.....companionship, someone to love, children. Because of his choices, he has consigned himself to a life of being alone.

This is a relatively short, fast paced read that you'll whizz through to find out who is left standing at the end. It's a snapshot of a young John Rain, hitman/budding philosopher, that pushes him a little further down the path of the man he will become. Highly recommend this series.

Sean says

Received from Netgalley for honest review.

This is the first one I have read from Barry Eisler in his John Rain series. I know it is way out of sequence, but this was a very good start to get started with.

The writing was crisp and really well thought out and all the characters were really very good. I like John Rain and I will read some more of this series.

Really enjoyable read and well worth a go.

Nancy says

This was a thrill ride. Lots of insight into the strategy aspect of action.

Tim says

I received a copy of this book from the publisher through NetGalley to read and review

ZERO SUM by Barry Eisler is the 9th book in the John Rain Series, and John has returned to Tokyo and has met up with a close friend from the past and offers to help his friend out with a named Victor, an alleged son of a Soviet general and native Japanese mother who has been eliminating employees after threatening to do so at his friend's firm at an alarming rate, thereby forcing his services to be secured at an exorbitant rate.

Rain is advised strongly by his friend not to get involved, but he insists and goes undercover to join Victor's group of professional assassins, which puts both he and his friend's lives in great danger.

Maria is the wife of the target assigned to Rain by Victor, a top level politician, which is both good and bad; good in that it provides him with an inside window into his target's movements, but bad that John falls for Maria affecting his focus that needs to be entirely on the task at hand.

Will John Rain be able to successfully bring down Victor and his crew without harming those he cares about, and is he capable of separating his feelings for Maria to focus on the task at hand?

Barry Eisler does an excellent job presenting an espionage/special ops novel that is unusual in that it focuses as much on the thoughts of John and the personalities of the others, while maintaining a level of action sufficient to keep the book from being bogged down, and the hand-to-hand combat situations are very well done; even though they are graphic in description I didn't find them overdone, and would look forward to reading others books in the series having started with this one.

4 stars.

Glen says

It's 1982, and John Rain is back in Tokyo after a decade fighting in various secret wars. He tries to get back into the only game he knows, murder for hire.

Unfortunately for him, there is now a monopoly in that field, owned by a half-Russian thug named Victor. (A nod to Tom Woods's Victor the Russian Assassin series?) Victor is causing problems for the whole country. Rain infiltrates his organization, and of course, meets a beautiful woman.

Very good stuff, with a great portrait of 1980's Tokyo.

Jeanie says

I had outmaneuvered the son of the most powerful yakuza in Tokyo, a guy who had earned the sobriquet "Mad Dog", picking off his soldiers one by one as they tried to hunt me down. I had spent a lifetime learning and implementing the lessons of guerilla warfare-first, as a half-breed kid bullied in

Japan and in the working-class American town my mother brought me to after my father had died; then in Vietnam; and then again most recently, in the Philippines. I was good at violence. Exceptionally good. Exceptionally unfazed by it. There's a cost to that kind of aptitude, and maybe the cost isn't worth it. But for the moment the cost wasn't the point. The point was, I was good.

This is my first John Rain and I have put the others on notice on my to read shelf. I was intrigued by this guy. His Japanese background, not being accepted, finding his way, and his own brand of justice. He has been pulled into a Japanese mob of sorts. A man that is half Japanese and half Russian with his own issues. His own issues that Rain in the end came to an understanding. But I am getting ahead of myself. Rain has been hired in a unconventional way to kill a Japanese diplomat.

One thing that I did not know is that Japan does not allow guns in their country. The author does an exceptional job of introducing to his readers to Japanese culture and using real places that may not be familiar to the average joe. In fact, the author has put in the back of his book, notes of places that are mentioned and the significance of Japanese culture. For me personally, I felt a real connection (my mother in law is Japanese).

Back on track- Rain must find out the reason for the hit before he finds himself 6 feet under. All the while, he finds himself attracted to the diplomats wife and things get a little complicated. The narration is what draws me ...It's the details without being bogged down with the details. There is a methodical way to Rain, he is aware of his surroundings and the people he deals with. It kind of left me spell bound.

A Special Thank You to Thomas Mercer and Netgalley for the ARC and the opportunity to post an honest review.

Michael Hicks says

After a stand-alone title (*The God's Eye View*) and the introduction of new series heroine (Livia Lone), Barry Eisler returns with a new John Rain thriller, his ninth, a prequel title that picks up a decade after *Graveyard of Memories*.

This time around, Rain is tasked with eliminating a Japanese politician after taking a job from Victor, a Russian crime boss who has been displacing the Yakuza. Why Victor wants the politician dead and who he answers to are Rain's central mysteries, and after becoming romantically enmeshed with the pol's Italian wife and with his own life on the line John doesn't have a lot of time left with which to operate.

After last year's *Livia Lone*, I can almost imagine Eisler turning back to his series staple with a degree of relief. There's a comfortable familiarity to a John Rain book, even as we venture back in time to see a younger, less experienced, less seasoned assassin, and it doesn't have the brooding darkness and emotional torment that Livia brought along with her. While Rain is still an emotionally complex figure, and the author continues to find neat new facets of the character to explore, there's also a certain sense that Eisler is happily unfettered from having to explore the psychological repercussions of long-term abuse and the grisliness of sex crimes that predominated *Livia Lone*. In fact, there are several moments where this book feels downright fun.

Zero Sum is a leaner, breezier adventure with some great action scenes and a bit of tenderness thanks to Rain's relationship with Maria. It's interesting to see him romantically outclassed by an older woman who takes him to school more than a few times, and who leaves an indelible mark on his development that long-

time reader's should appreciate.

Mostly, it's just good to have John Rain back again. I'd love to catch up with him in the present-day, post-*The Detachment*, but I'll take whatever I can get.

[Note: I received an advanced copy of this title from the publisher via NetGalley.]

Larry H says

There are few authors out there today who can get my pulse racing like Barry Eisler, especially when it's one of his John Rain thrillers. These books are the perfect balance of excellent character development, crackling action, and heart-in-your-throat tension, and I honestly cannot get enough of them. Why these books aren't as well-known by the general public as some more-mediocre series is beyond me.

I'm happy to report that Eisler's newest John Rain thriller, *Zero Sum*, is equally as fantastic as its predecessors. This is another book which recalls Rain's earlier days, tracing the rise of this lethal-yet-complicated mercenary. It's 1982, and Rain has returned to Tokyo after a 10-year absence working in the Philippines. When he meets with an old friend in order to find some murder-for-hire work, he discovers that the assassin business has been monopolized by an upstart—Victor—half-Russian, half-Japanese, all psychotic, with a chip on his shoulder and the belief everyone should fear him.

Victor has cornered the market on all murders for hire, upsetting even the crime families. Rain is determined to find out how he was able to get such a toehold in the system so quickly, and find out where his support was coming from. Despite warnings to the contrary, Rain gets hired by Victor, who presents him with an interesting challenge: kill a government minister or face bloody death at the hands of Victor or one of his henchmen.

Although the job should be easy for someone with Rain's skills, Rain isn't one to take the easy path. He's more interesting in stalling in order to get Victor riled up, which would give Rain an opportunity to take him out. But what Rain doesn't count on is Maria, the government minister's beautiful Italian wife, who awakens passions that Rain has tamped down for far too long. Getting mixed up with the wife of the man he's supposed to murder certainly complicates things, and the more he finds out about the forces that brought Victor into play, and what they really want, the higher the stakes get for Rain—and everyone he cares about.

"When you live a little longer, you see the world as it really is. And yes, even then it can be shiny and bright, but also you know it has sharp edges. And sometimes what's shiny is exactly what's sharp. If you want to get close to it, it means you get cut."

Zero Sum moves at a lightning pace, with lots of fantastic action, although the violence gets a bit graphic and gruesome, so if you're bothered by that, this might not be the book for you. There are political conspiracies, psychotic killers, introspection, and some pretty hot sex thrown in for good measure. Eisler and John Rain are once again truly at the top of their game, and it is always so great to be back in Rain's world. (As much as I love his John Rain books, I'm hoping Eisler will write another book with one of his newest characters, Livia Lone, who featured in her own eponymous book last year.)

While Eisler has had a few bestsellers, interestingly enough, they tend to be his more modern thrillers rather than his John Rain books. But truly, these are fantastic, because there's so much to them beyond suspense

and action. These are smart, well-written, and, dare I say, even sensitive. Here's hoping there are more John Rain stories to tell!

NetGalley and Thomas & Mercer provided me an advance copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review. Thanks for making this available!

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blog...>
