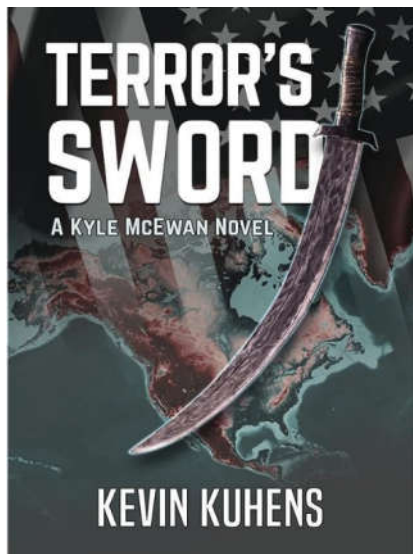


A tough hero, a diverse tactical team and a realistic biological threat fuel suspenseful “Terror’s Sword”

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As a former editorial writer, I recall that one of the best descriptions of my job is that we’re the ones who come down after the catastrophe to pick at the pieces and find material. And I’ve often told my writing students that the best scribblers are like vampires — they suck the life energy out of folks, distill it, and use it for inspiration. So probably the biggest ghouls of all must be suspense writers; they’re good at plucking the latest shock, be it a calamity or a tragedy, and spinning it into literary gold.

All of this is a run-up to discussing “Terror’s Sword” by Kevin Kuhens. The author rides the Jack Reacher wave to create a sufficiently tough yet centered hero, Kyle McEwan, who speaks a zillion languages and fights like a martial artist with a machine gun. But

what saves Kuhens’ book from being yet another Tom Clancy knockoff is his fidelity to real time and real life.

Here’s what I mean: Kuhens’ team, made up of a rainbow of Americans from all races and genders, run up against a fiendish Middle Eastern psychopath whose goal is to destroy the United States. Well, that’s sort of like real life, when an African American president commanded a polyglot of people to take down Osama bin Laden.

OK. Been there, read that, and even saw the movie. But what sets “Terror’s Sword” apart is that Kuhens adds yet another believable crisis to the first: The terrorist’s goal may be a biological weapon sprayed into the environment — a strain of smallpox that would be death on wheels to a world in which the last vaccines for the disease were administered 25 years ago.

Suddenly Kuhens’ fictional president is faced with the possibility of lockdowns, forced vaccination, and all the real and imagined perils some leaders faced and others shirked during the COVID pandemic. The shady machinations of the government within the government are explored, as Kuhens again snatches the latest news and rumors and make them a part of his rollicking suspense novel. Suddenly it gets real — and Kuhens’ book, by its addition of evils, becomes almost real as well. For a novelist, that’s as good as it gets.

I’d like to return to a major theme of the novel: diversity. Herman Melville’s “Redburn” remarked, as he watched emigrants leaving for America, that the United States was not a country, it was a world. And, since worlds are usually bigger than nations, that weight in diverse people explains why our society has become the world’s most dominant. How ironic that our strength, which has always been our diversity, is being threatened by some politicians today. From Navajo code talkers to the Tuskegee Airmen, our nation’s ability to muster a multiplicity of talent while other nations bring to battle a primarily homogeneous force has always been America’s true key to victory.



Kuhens’ book, available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), reminds us that Americans only win when we ride into battle together. But instead of presenting us with a dull treatise on the benefits of a multicultural pluralistic society, Kuhens instead takes us on a wild ride fueled by headlines we all know and dread.