Sean Drummond is a cocky Army lawyer with a long history in the secret world of special operations. When the legal maverick is assigned by the top brass to investigate a Bosnian massacre in which a Green Beret A-team and the Kosovo Liberation Army detachment they were advising got trapped behind Serbian lines, he gets the subtext thats part of his orders. What the Army doesnt need are headlines about the cold-blooded execution of 35 Serbian soldiers, and theyre counting on Drummond to clean things up fast, before a public scandal blows dirt all over their medals. Drummond is provided with two associates to help with the investigation: an attractive young woman captain whos a Harvard Law School graduate, and an equally illustrious Judge Army Generals Corps lawyer whose reputation precedes him. Once Drummond and his team get to Bosnia, its clear that the accused Green Berets have their own cover-up going, and theyre not going to make it easy for the lawyers to figure out what happened. Drummond has a few tricks up his own sleeve, and when he finds out that his CO has put a spy on his team, hes even more determined to get to the bottom of what really went on, even if he has to bully his way out of a murder frame-up to do it. The moral dilemma Drummond faces when he learns the real story (and understands why the Army is so desperate to keep the cover-up going) reveals the man behind the maverick, and lifts Brian Haigs novel a cut above the genre. Haig might have spent more time making his secondary characters as interesting as his protagonist and tightened up his narrative. Still, fans of military thrillers will find this a good enough read. --Jane Adams

I read this first novel by Brian Haig after immensely enjoying THE KINGMAKER (five star review of 5/13/03), the third novel with Major Sean Drummond as the central character. I wanted to understand the character development of Drummond and surmised that this book would be a fast paced easy read. If you are interested in the military/legal thriller genre, you will probably enjoy this story by Haig, a West Point graduate and the son of former Secretary of State (I am in charge) Alexander Haig. The obvious reason is that Drummonds previous experiences are relevant to
the later stories in the series, but in addition I would guess my recognition of the flaws in this book was substantially increased (and perhaps my rating influenced negatively) by the progress the author has made as the series has progressed. In my review of THE KINGMAKER, I labeled Drummond The James Bond of the Legal Profession; in this book his skills are not nearly as developed, the action is less intense, and his personality is not as appealing.

The storyline is straightforward. Drummond is chosen to lead a team investigating an apparent massacre of thirty-five Serbs by an elite Green Beret team in retaliation for the slaughter of a group of Kosovars who they were advising during the Balkan war. His team also includes a beautiful but aloof defense attorney, Lisa Morrow, and a by-the-book prosecutor, Captain James Delbert, both of whom possess more impressive credentials than Drummond. In addition, given the high profile and potentially explosive nature of the incident, they have been given a very tight deadline in which to complete their report. As you might imagine, they are met by a wall of noncooperation if not complete silence. However, the physical evidence certainly calls into question the official version of events. Additional violence and intrigue occurs, and it isn’t clear whether it is related to attempts to hinder their investigation or just misdirection by the author.

This is what might be termed a military investigation procedural, and unfortunately I am not an expert in a lot of the areas with which this book deals. (E.g, JAG procedure and rules of evidence, Army ranks, etc.) and thus cannot address the criticisms of some other reviewers about the technical aspects of this story. But it is fast moving and certainly plausibly plotted. The major positives were actually the knowledge imparted by the discussion of some of the history and geography relevant to the Balkan conflict and the examination of the moral ambiguities often highlighted in retrospect by such events as that portrayed in this book. Drummond is conflicted by his role in not only trying to assemble the facts but present his conclusions in a way that balances all the competing interests involved. At the same time, tensions develop within his group and along the chain of command above him.

The major negative was the straightforward presentation of the story and the seeming inevitability of the eventual conclusion. The plot is neither particularly complex or intrinsically interesting. Thus, the tension involved the interactions among the participants (including Drummond and Morrow’s evolving relationship), whether and how the truth could be assembled, and how the greater good embodied in the major geopolitical considerations involved would interact with the determination of the details and small truths of this particular event. And this is done in a very balanced and thoughtful way. (I imagine such issues as what ends justify what means are of great interest to the author, and they are certainly playing out in the military engagement in Iraq today although in a very different way.)

I enjoyed the book enough so that I also plan to read MORTAL ALLIES (the second book in the series) in the hope that the evolution of Drummond’s character and the author’s skills will have proceeded meaningfully by that point. In summary, I was satisfied but not excited by
this book, while I loved THE KINGMAKER (now available in paperback). So, if part of your enjoyment is finding new authors and following their development and the evolution of their characters, then read this series in order. But if you want to read only the best story and to meet a really intriguing fictional character combined with a fascinating plot, go straight to the third book in the series.

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