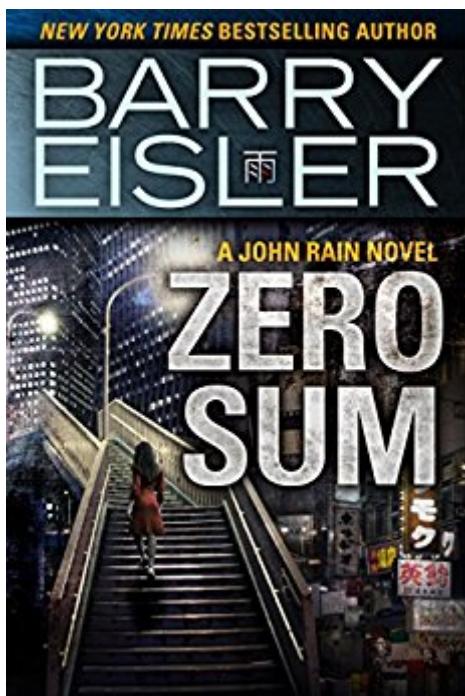


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Zero Sum (A John Rain Novel)



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

Another disappointment I must say. I have read and have every one of Barry Eisler's books and most have been 5 stars, although those

were the first four or five. However, this book continues the trend that the books and story line has been getting stale and, honestly, somewhat repetitive. As a prequel, I expected and wanted more to the John Rain story of his early life and actions in Japan. How he gets his start, the reasons the interactions, etc. I found that there was less here than in the first few Rain novels. Yes, there were some explanations, but it left too much unanswered and felt like a rush to finish the story. Also, I found it repetitive and a little hackneyed that the reason he left Japan because of a woman coincided with his first novel on too many levels. It did not feel right, read right or even make sense. If it was to show that he would keep repeating his actions from his early time to the later novels I can see it, but not agree with it with the way it was presented. I also expected a lot more of the story and was surprised with how short it was. The book had a feel of 'let's tell as little as we can and finish as fast as possible without adding anything to the characters, their development or any new characters'. Everything was one dimensional and the action scenes read like a repeat of most of the other books.

I wish I could give Zero Sum 6 stars. Its that good. I've had a love-hate relationship with Barry Eisler. I mean, I LOVE his books! But I hate that I always have to wait so long between installments of the John Rain series. But I suppose that's just me being greedy and whining like a bitch. But indulge me for a moment. His last two books weren't in this series, so I grudgingly read them anyhow, knowing they'd be good just because they're from Barry Eisler, but secretly wishing we could get more John Rain. (not surprisingly, both of those books, The God's Eye View and Livia Lone turned out to be awesome also so maybe I should just shut up and read). Then when we finally got a new John Rain book, Zero Sum was a flash back to his past. Again I was pining away for the next book in the timeline, it seemed we were going backwards instead of forward. But once again I needed to just stop bitching and read the damn thing. So I did, and it blew me away. Zero Sum is a masterful piece of thriller fiction. While I still want to know where John Rain is going next, I found this dip into his past to be highly satisfying. This is actually the second time we've flashed back with our favorite assassin (Graveyard of Memories showed us how an even younger John Rain got started in the killing for hire business), and I'll admit I highly enjoyed that one as well. But here in Zero Sum we get to meet John Rain as a journeyman assassin. He's not quite as green as he was in GoM, but still not as seasoned as he is in the installments that are later in the timeline. And its a different John Rain. We see him make mistakes, we see him struggle with his anxieties, we see him do a few dumb things that younger people might do. And we see him learn a few lessons that we've already seen him put into regular implementation in the later-timeline books. Barry Eisler masterfully puts his

character into this state of incomplete development. It was fascinating to watch. Despite his still-evolving skillset, John Rain still prevails (not a spoiler, he had to for the rest of the books to exist) by sheer talent and instinct. While he has some close calls, he beats the bad guys in the end, and also continues to develop relationships with other key players we already know we'll meet later in his timeline. The quality of Eisler's prose is excellent. The words flow effortlessly, with no words or sentences that seem awkward or unnatural. And the story is intellectually deep too, for a thriller. As always, Eisler takes us inside John Rain's mind, shows us the struggles he's having. We get to see him grow and develop. This is no typical one-dimensional thriller hero. I suppose Eisler has earned the right to put off another installment in the older-aged John Rain's adventures for a while now. He earned it with this one. But I've just learned that the second book in the Livia Lone series is next out. But now I'm eagerly anticipating that one too! Well done, Mr. Eisler.

"Zero Sum" is the second John Rain "prequel" from author Barry Eisler, exploring the formative years of the deadly assassin. It begins in 1982, and Rain has returned to Japan after spending a decade as a mercenary in the Philippines. Reaching out to a former contact and friend, Miyamoto, in the hope of landing some freelance work, he learns that, while there are adversaries to be terminated, the killing business in Tokyo is now firmly under the control of a half-Japanese, half-Russian of questionable sanity, named Victor. Any and all contract assassinations flow through him, with dire consequences for those who try to buck the new status quo. Victor is extorting his clients, and he is also blocking Rain's only means of income - he has to be removed. To get close to Victor, Rain has Miyamoto introduce him to the new boss as a potential employee. Victor hires Rain, but Rain soon realizes he may have bitten off more than he chew - Victor is both terrifying and deadly. Worse, in attempting to acquire the target Victor has assigned him, Rain blunders into a relationship with the man's stunning Italian wife. He has drawn far too much attention to himself, Victor has him on the clock, and if he fails to murder the husband of a woman he comes to care for, Miyamoto will be killed in retribution. Once again, Rain must wage war not only against his physical enemies, but against himself. The two sides of his persona - one that craves human contact and acceptance, and the other, the ice man, that makes him such an effective killing machine - simply cannot coexist peacefully, and Rain finds himself in the thick of an internal struggle that will plague him for the rest of his life. This is a solid, if unspectacular John Rain outing. Eisler writes with his usual thoughtfulness, tight plotting, sense of place and verve for violence, but while it is intriguing to see the protagonist continue the journey he began in "Graveyard of Memories" - and even to see patterns emerge that the reader will recognize in the older, wiser, Rain - it's just a bit rote. We've

seen much of this, albeit with some variation, in not only the prior prequel, but in the "main" John Rain novels. It's a worthy read, particularly for longtime fans, but it plumbs little in the way of new depths for the main character.

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