



## Nothing Short of Dying

*Erik Storey*

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Hailed by the bestselling writer William Kent Krueger as “the year’s best thriller debut,” this rollercoaster read features a Jack Reacher-like drifter protagonist with lethal skills whose mission to rescue his abducted sister pits him against a meth kingpin seeking to control all the trade in the Western United States.

Sixteen years. That’s how long Clyde Barr has been away from Colorado’s thick forests, alpine deserts, and craggy peaks, running from a past filled with haunting memories. But now he’s back, having roamed across three continents as a hunter, adventurer, soldier of fortune, and most recently, unjustly imprisoned convict. And once again, his past is reaching out to claim him.

By the light of a flickering campfire, Clyde received a frantic phone call for help from Jen, the youngest of his three older sisters. Then the line goes dead. Clyde doesn’t know how much time he has. He doesn’t know where Jen is located. He doesn’t even know who has her. All he knows is that nothing short of dying will stop him from saving her.

Tagging along with Clyde on this strange, desperate, against-all-odds rescue mission is a young woman named Allie whose motivations for hurtling into harm’s way are fascinatingly complex. As the duo races against the clock, it is Allie who gets Clyde to see what he has become and what he can be.

## Nothing Short of Dying Details

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## From Reader Review Nothing Short of Dying for online ebook

**Karen says**

NOTHING SHORT OF DYING is the debut release from author Erik Storey, which arrived with considerable fanfare. It's flagged as something that will have Lee Child's Reacher watching over his shoulder which clearly flags this is action packed, with a lone hero up against it from all sides central character.

Clyde Barr is a mountain man, hunter and a mercenary. After many years fighting conflicts in Africa amongst other places, and a torrid stint in a Mexican jail he's heading back to his native Colorado, out into the mountains, going bush as we'd say in Australia, looking for a low key sort of life. Which all goes to hell in a hand-basket when he gets a frantic call from one of his sisters, and heads out to save the day. At this point you start to find out that Barr's personal life is anything but uncomplicated, his family is fractured, his younger sister has been a bit of a trial and just about everybody is flat out nasty or at the very least disinterested. Unless you count Allie the barmaid with a sort of heart of gold and taste for adventure, who joins him on quest, serving as companion, love interest and recently arrived conscience or reason to get his act together.

NOTHING SHORT OF DYING is really quite the roller-coaster ride, and in that I'm not just referring to the action packed, race to find and free the sister. There are many highs and lows in dealing with Barr to navigate as well. The action here is bloody and violent, there's a feeling of the wild west about the pace, and the free-wheeling bash, crash and killing spree. Whilst it's obvious that those who have taken Jen are definitely the black hat wearers, Barr's not so easy to pigeon-hole. There are times when he feels like part of the problem - with a tendency to wipe out anybody who even looks like they are going to get in his way, and times he's haunted by memories of things that have gone wrong in the past, people who he's failed to save, bodies he's left in his wake. And of course, there's a budding romance with Allie - who is carting around more than a few issues of her own.

There were points where I absolutely loved NOTHING SHORT OF DYING, and points where I'd cheerfully have flung it across a room. Whilst there are aspects of Barr's characterisation that rang true, that has to balanced up against the constant concept of anything can be solved if you shoot it, hit it hard enough, or drive around it fast enough. All of which has been done - to death - before, although undoubtedly that doesn't sound particularly fair as the same could be said of lots of thrillers. It's all going to come down to a question of connection with Barr and even with Allie. If, as a reader he's somebody you instantly feel you can barrack for, or even just understand a bit, then the quibbles will disappear. If he's somebody you're struggling with, then the lack of subtlety, and the constant bang bang, shoot 'em up, loner out to save the day, getting it wrong, getting it right and the extreme violence is going to be less successful.

NOTHING SHORT OF DYING is definitely one for readers to make their own minds up about.

<https://www.austcrimefiction.org/reviews/>

Michael says

Clyde Barr is fresh out of prison and hoping to stay clean for a while. For the last sixteen years, he has tried to bury the demons of an abusive childhood at the hands of his mother's numerous boyfriends. Clyde and his

sister Jen were constantly abused till one night they cracked with devastating consequences. For years he has traveled the world as a mercenary and hunter. His hopes of trying to put his past where it belongs go out the window when he gets a phone call from Jen.

She is being held in the Colorado mountains by a ruthless drug dealer and Clyde will vow the rescue her and make her captors pay. Head honcho Alvis though is a man to be reckoned with, who has a small army of thugs who will do anything to try and stop Clyde. Along the way, he will meet an ally in Allie who has her own reason to help Clyde and another associate who is not what he seems.

*Erik Storey's* debut novel is one that moves along well enough with solid actions scenes and the descriptions of the landscape are vivid but I can't get past the dialogue that is, to put it mildly, flat as a tack. The action scenes themselves have for me at least a formulaic flow about them, and as a result did not engage me as much as I thought they would. Not a bad read by any means and if you are an action junkie then you eat this up, but for the rest of us, it is a good but safe read.

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## **Paul says**

### Nothing Short of Dying – Better Than Rambo

Nothing Short of Dying is the debut thriller from American Erik Storey, who already has a fan in the writer Jeffrey Deaver. Even in the press they say Jack Reacher needs to be worried by the new character Clyde Barr, to me he is more Rambo, but with brains, and more dangerous than Reacher. Jack Reacher may be the king of the thriller in the city, but Clyde Barr would eat him alive out in the wilderness.

Jeffrey Deaver and CJ Box both recommend Erik Story and they are not wrong, he is a very talented writer, and such a brilliant storyteller, who knows how to keep you interested. He has created a story that paints the mountains and valleys of Colorado red with the blood of those who cross him. This book will grab you from page one all the way to the end and leave you breathless as this really is a roller coaster ride of emotions and passion.

Since being released from a Mexican Jail Clyde Barr has been living in the wilds of Utah away from any humans, just him, nature and the big blue sky. When he receives a call from his sister Jen asking for him to come to her aid and rescue her, and Barr always keeps the promised he made, especially to his sister.

Barr's most powerful instinct is also the one that could bring about his early demise, that he has to right the wrongs of the world. This compulsion is driven by his childhood where he and his sister suffered at the hands of his mother's boyfriends, and she at the hands of those boyfriends. He has made a life out of helping those in need especially in the Third World and in South and Central America.

In his attempt to find his sister violence erupts around him like a volatile Icelandic volcano as men, just as war weary as himself. On his journey to find his sister amongst the drug lords of Colorado he finds one person who becomes his ally, Allie, and plenty of people who want to kill him. His mercenary skills that have served him so well across the world are called upon to help him survive, and what does become obvious is he has more lives than your average cat.

Clyde Barr has all the skills of Rambo, but with the brains to use those friends he has to find his enemies who have his sister. It becomes very clear the only way that those who hold his sister will have to kill Barr to

stop him. Problem is they have to find him first, and if they do keep hold of him.

Nothing Short of Dying is one of the best debut thrillers I have read from an American author in a very long time. Barr is that classic anti-hero, everything about him screams avoid like the plague and Storey has created a character you cannot help but get behind. Barr is everything a modern man wants to be, when not sat on his sofa, a man mountain action man and survival specialist who is not to be messed with.

Nothing Short of Dying is a thriller that is gritty, authentic and new with a character who men want to be and women want to be with. He is the bad ass we all wish we could be and delivers a relentless ride in to some very dark places on a thrill ride that is non-stop. This really is a brilliant thriller and hard to believe something so accomplished can be a debut, buckle up this is one hell of a ride.

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### **Judy Collins says**

With this exceptional entry, *Erik Storey*, a natural born storyteller, solidifies his place at the upper end of the literary crime thriller "rural noir" fiction genre, **NOTHING SHORT OF DYING** —Tenacious Clyde Barr *dirt-under-your fingernails, kind of raw*, a character you want on your side; rugged, a tough-as-nails hero, we can count on.

**The gritty novel** begins with a phone call in the Utah wilderness about a week after Clyde Barr had been released from prison. He had hoped for a storybook homecoming; however, in reality, this was not a dream life. He likes the wilderness and living off the grid, with no technology or frills.cds

**Jen, his sister** called with a desperate SOS- she needed for him to come and get her. Throughout their childhood, they had been through nights of their mom and dad fighting, mom's boyfriends, drunks, loss of control, fighting, and abuse. Mostly hiding out to ride out the storm. The two of them against the world. *They have secrets.*

**Jen explained** in a whispered voice, for Clyde to hurry, he was going to kill her. She was to help, and then he would kill her. She reminded him he owed her. Before she could tell him where she was, Barr heard a male voice and the line went dead.

**He was her flesh and blood.** She had a knack for finding the wrong people, times, and places. He had left her to fend for herself because he had been selfish. Now he owed her. This was his chance to make up for his mistakes; however, he needed a track to follow, a direction. *Barr knows that nothing short of dying will stop him from saving her.*

**After their dad left,** and their mom died, he did something stupid which almost got him killed. Jen did something worse that saved his life. If anyone ever found out what they had done, they would be serving life sentences. Jen kept quiet and he was free. They had been to hell and back. *He would do whatever she asked.*

**Clyde begins his journey** for his sister. She was in trouble again and most likely mixed up with somebody very dangerous. From Colorado, outdoorsman, Clyde Barr returns to the states after serving as a gun for hire in Africa and South American. After leaving Juarez prison, Clyde is camping and receives the phone call. He has no clue where she could be. He has had no contact with his family in years.

**On his journey**, he meets Allie Martin, a bartender. They both are equally stubborn. Soon a relationship develops as they travel deeper into the remote Colorado's high country. From drug-ring politics, meth houses, and violence. However, despite the challenges, nothing will stop Barr from reaching his sister, and his strong loyalty to family and blood.

**What he was dealing with**, he had underestimated. In a matter of days, he was dealing with drug dealer gangs, feds, and a girl who started to mean something. So much, for the quiet life. *Shortly thereafter, an intense race against time.*

**Storey**, introduces strong female characters, in addition to Barr, for women readers; Allie and Jen, which proves riveting heroes in their own right. Jen is no poor victim. A gal who can handle herself. With a rich cast of characters, an action-packed tale of grit, emotion, desperation, and the resilience of family. From good to evil, the author explores both extremes.

**New fans** will anxiously be awaiting the next installment of pulp-action hero, Clyde Barr. Stark and gripping, with a strong sense of place in rural rich areas, and bold nuanced characterization reminiscent, of *Ace Atkins, Lee Child (Jack Reacher), Craig Johnson, and CJ Box.*

**As the author mentions** in an interview, “The book isn’t a cup of tea at all; it’s whiskey on the rocks.”

Indeed, it is like sipping and savoring the spirit. So grab a glass, pour yourself some whiskey, kick back in your leather man (or woman) chair, and do some taste testing and follow Clyde Bar on his adventure. Feel like kickin’ it old school? Have your whiskey in a tin cup in the great outdoors, a perfect side-kick for *Nothing Short of Dying*.

I am always fascinated with the inspiration behind books and authors. Thoroughly enjoyed the Interview with Erik Storey.

“I wanted to show off this side of the state,” he continues. “It’s not as visited as Denver. Western Colorado, Utah, Nevada, Idaho — they’re kind of forgotten. People will fly into the cities, but because the population density is so small, they overlook the rest of the region. To a lot of people, the West is kind of an obscure concept. I want to promote this area with my books.

As Clyde’s quest takes him from small town to small town throughout Colorado — Riverside, Clifton, Palisade, De Beque, Rifle, Meeker, Mack, Leadville, Steamboat Springs — he unearths both the grandeur and grit of life in the high country and on the Western Slope.

What does define Clyde’s character, besides his tenacity and honor, is a deep distrust of cell phones, apps, computers and every other innovation that distracts from the simplicity of humanity’s bond with the land?

In addition to the advanced reading copy, also purchased the audio version, narrated by *Jeremy Bobb* (sexy, edgy, gritty), a perfect match for Storey’s smashing debut, for a full throttle performance ride.

**Worthy of the hype**, *Nothing Short of Dying*, equal parts rural country noir and contemporary Western, with a tough hero to stand up and cheer for, and not to be messed with. A rugged guy, the kind you would

want to be alone in the wilderness with, for more than one reason.

**Storey is an author** to follow with many epic-adventures to follow. Sounds like we will visit Clyde next, as he wanders onto a Native American reservation, which mysteriously seems to have been taken over by an outlaw biker gang – and there's report of terrorist activity in the area. *A Promise to Kill*

*Can't wait. Movie worthy. Awesome cover. Bring it on!*

*A special thank you to Scribner and NetGalley for an ARC in exchange for an honest review.*

JDCMustReadBooks

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### **Teresa says**

Clyde Barr is a drifter, a mercenary with a heart, a mountain man and a hunter. After sixteen years lending his muscle and expertise in conflicts across Africa and beyond, taking care of the little guy, fighting for the downtrodden and choosing sides in various third world conflicts, Clyde is tired and feeling his age. Having recently been released from a spell in a Mexican prison where he barely made it out alive, he is back in his native Colorado, in the mountains he loves, looking forward to retirement from conflict, and a quieter way of life, when he receives a panic-stricken phone call from his beloved sister Jen, pleading with him to "come and get her". He has no idea where Jen is or who has abducted her, but since their shared and troubled childhood, Clyde and his older sister Jen have had a particular bond. Nothing will prevent him from rescuing her.

And so it begins. Clyde's hunt for his sister is a roller-coaster of a ride through the wilderness, and small towns of America. A violent, bloody, modern day western of drug barons, hard men and hired guns. Throughout it all Clyde is driven by one thing - the need to save his sister. By day he mows down anyone who gets in his way, and at night he battles his demons, haunted by the memories of past conflicts, the women and children he failed to save, and the bloody bodies he left in his wake. Yet amid all this chaos, and the smell of gun smoke, Clyde shows us his softer side by finding the time to fall in love and rescue a damsel in distress, along the way.

This is Erik Storey's debut novel. With this book he shows us what master story teller he is, and the quality of his writing sweeps the reader along and kept me up into the early hours. I really enjoyed this book.

Thrillers are my usual genre of choice, although I don't usually go for action packed thrillers like this one. However, I really fell for Clyde Barr. He is Jack Reacher with a heart. He makes silly mistakes, really daft ones where you find yourself shaking your head in disbelief. He tries to do the right thing, he really wants to heal the world, but somehow he has to kill a load of bad men to make good things happen. This book is not for the faint hearted, but if you like thrillers, especially action thrillers, and if you long for the wild west where the lines between good and bad get a little blurry at times, and if you like your heroes, scarred, tough, and at times ruthless, and with a moral code all of their own, you will enjoy *Nothing Short of Dying*, like I did.

The really great news is that *Nothing Short of Dying* is the first book in the Clyde Barr series. The bad news is we are going to have to wait for book two! If the second Clyde Barr novel is anything like the first, it will be worth the wait, and I plan to be first in the queue!

Thank you to newbooks/nudge, the publisher Simon & Schuster UK, and the author Erik Storey for my free copy of Nothing Short of Dying, in return for an honest review.

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### **Benoit Lelièvre says**

I usually don't like this type of novel very much, but I have to admit this one was very well executed. **NOTHING SHORT OF DYING** is an action thriller in the vein of Jack Reacher novels. It might not have the intricate mystery aspect of Lee Child's books, but it makes up with meaningful, pertinent action scenes that reveal bits about its character: hillbilly turned mercenary turned professional badass Clyde Barr.

I had a love/hate relationship with Barr's exposition scenes, which I thought were very stereotypical, but gave his family a strangeness and an antagonistic edge that are rather uncommon in this type of books (what kind of big sister doesn't protect their little brother? This kind of things are interesting to me). Can't say **NOTHING SHORT OF DYING** was exactly my cup of tea, but I can't argue with the execution here. It's brilliantly delivered and it reads itself. If you're looking for a new action thriller, this should definitely be your pick.

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### **MarciaB - Book Muster Down Under says**

Clyde Barr just wants to disappear into the wilderness. After the last few years, who can blame him - mercenary and hired gun on three different continents, prisoner on one - call him what you want, he's tired and needs to regain some sense of himself. He also doesn't really need the added complications of electronic communication like a mobile phone but, in this day and age, it seems to be a must-have.

Only problem is, the next call he receives is going to shatter his much sought-after solitude with a cry for help from his youngest sister who doesn't even get a chance to let him know where she is!

In trying to figure out her whereabouts and who may have her, he finds himself teaming up with Allie, a bartender with her own reasons for running, who just might know the answer to that question. Together they begin the search! Travelling through wide open spaces and into the mountains looking for clues, they also find themselves fighting for their lives when they cross the paths of some ruthless drug dealers and are double-crossed by someone Clyde once called a friend!

As the bodies pile up and he and Allie grow closer, vignettes of a fractured family, abusive relationships and an obscure past begin to form the patchwork of history that is Clyde Barr.

This one had been glaring at me from my reading pile for some time and, not having read a "Jack Reacher" novel (to whom Clyde Barr has been compared), I wasn't quite sure what to expect. I picked it up anyway, thinking that I'd "expand my horizons" so to speak – and I'm so glad that I did because Erik Storey is a remarkable storyteller.

Not only does he give us non-stop action right the way through but in Clyde Barr, he introduces us to an extremely complex man, slowly peeling back the layers to reveal an honourable, albeit tough-as-nails hero.

He's rugged, a wanderer with a strong sense of justice, tough but soft when he needs to be and if there's one thing he loves more than anything else, it's his sisters – even if they're not all on speaking terms with him. As a woman, I could just fall in love with Clyde - he's not afraid or ashamed to stand up for what's right, he keeps his word and will always defend the underdog!

There's a lot to enjoy in this novel which provided me with a few hours of adventurous escapism such as getting to know our hero whilst exploring Erik's lush setting of Colorado and the Appalachian Mountains that not only gives the reader a strong sense of place which is integral to the events unfolding around Clyde, but also shows that Erik knows it well.

Another big plus for me was that while there are a number of violent scenes (which is to be expected from the genre), Erik doesn't expose the reader to too much guts and gore. And, once his characters have served their purpose, he has no qualms about expiring them along the way.

Clyde Barr is an appealing lead character and Erik Storey's skill as a writer shines, making it hard to believe that this is a debut. He also strikes the right emotional balance so if you, like me, prefer your action thriller novels not to forsake depth, then don't hesitate to get this one on your list so that you too can welcome knight errant, Clyde Barr, to the fold.

With non-stop action right the way through and a skilfully crafted plot that picks up steadily, this is compulsive reading at its best from an author who is putting true adventure back into the action thriller genre. In saying that, I can confirm that I'm definitely a fan and that nothing short of dying will stop me from reading the next novel in the series!

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### **Julie says**

Nothing Short of Dying by Erik Storey is a 2016 Scribner publication. I was provided a copy of this book by the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

This is an amazing debut novel by Erik Storey!

Clyde Barr gets a frantic phone call from his sister, Jen, obviously in distress and in deep trouble. She needs his help and Clyde will do 'nothing short of dying' to save her.

Clyde is one of the most interesting protagonists to come along in crime fiction in a while. As the story begins, Clyde has just been released from prison, but don't let that fool you. He has a code of honor he lives by, and helping people in need happens to be his specialty, but it is especially important when it comes to Jen, the sister he shares a very close bond with.

So, leaving his peaceful Utah sanctuary, he heads to the rugged Colorado back country in search of Jen, determined to bring her home safe and sound. From this point on, the story takes on an adventuresome quality as Clyde meets a woman who can help him find Jen and insists on coming along with him.

The terrain they must travel over is rough, off the grid, with no technological help available. They must survive in a minimalist sort of way, hunting for food, showering in the rain, sleeping in tents, all while living on the edge of extreme danger from the men who are holding Jen hostage.

As the story unfolds, Clyde relates to the reader, via a first person narrative, his relationship with his sister and why they are so close despite, or because of, their turbulent upbringing. Clyde has never been able to stabilize, having spent significant time in Africa, then in prison, and is a bit of a loner/drifter. I get the idea he's like a poor man's 'Jack Reacher' and that his adventures are only just beginning. I predict the return of Clyde Barr and I rather doubt he will stay in one place for too long, and will always find a battle to fight on behalf of those unable to fight for themselves.

Overall, this is a gritty thriller, absorbing, suspenseful, fast paced and a multi-layered action-adventure, with compelling characters, emotional twists, and poignant, bittersweet coda.

Clyde learns a few life lessons along the way, that will most assuredly aide him in his quest to live in the moment and take life as it comes.

For a debut novel, this one is most impressive. Well written, perfectly paced, with excellent, often profound dialogue, constructed in a way that will appeal to a wide range of readers, from adventure lovers to the crime drama enthusiast.

Highly recommend!

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### **CL says**

Clyde Barr prefers to keep to himself away from everything and everyone when he receives a distress call from his sister for help. Clyde knows he will help her because when they were kids they formed a bond based on their father's abuse. His other sister will not help him so he starts to try and find her on his own. Along the way he inadvertently becomes involved with a young woman named Allie whom loses her job after her boss suspects her of helping him. As he tries to find his sister he and Allie get into a lot of trouble. Good read. I would like to thank the Publisher and Net Galley for the chance to read this ARC.

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### **Mark says**

Picture Chuck Norris playing a sort of Macgyver renegade with a dodgy past. Ok so that's the MC sorted.

Clyde Barr is a loner. After years as a mercenary and prison time he prefers to keep to himself. In the mountains, camping out and away from everything he receives a distress call from his sister for help. Clyde and his sister have a close bond formed by a pact when they were just kids dodging their step father's flying fists of rage.

Clyde knows he WILL help her but he has to find out what is going on and how he can help. His other sister is fed up with him and wants nothing to do with him so he begins to call in favours from all associates, some who would rather he kept his distance. Following leads he meets a young woman named Allie working in a run down pub. She willingly joins Clyde in his quest after he sorts a few things out for her that means she needs to leave in a hurry.

Clyde's intent is to get her out of harms way and then leave her to her own devices but she has a thirst for the

life and excitement that Clyde leads and before long Clyde becomes Bonnie and Clyde. What follows is a trek through the mountains and a betrayal from an old acquaintance leaving Clyde and Allie in a precarious situation..... but they have at least saved Clyde's sister Jen. Things change for the worse and the hunters become the hunted before a climatic ending.

A good easy read, a lot of fun and some great characters. Storey knows how to create a menacing character when he needs one.

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### **Larry says**

This was absolutely the worst book that I have ever finished. Seemed like a wanna be author penned this one. It was a Jack Reacher/Darrell Dixon (*Walking Dead*) type guy on a mission of mercy to save his sister from a drug kingpin. Amateurish writing in all regards. Should have put it down early but just didn't. Don't waste your time on this one if it's on your "to read" list.

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### **Brenda says**

The unexpected telephone call from the sister Clyde Barr hadn't seen or spoken to in years had him making a promise and packing up his camp to head to a civilisation he hadn't wanted to return to. Jen's panicked call which had abruptly ended had sent chills down Barr's spine – he knew she was in trouble; he also knew he had to find her before it was too late.

Barr had been out of his family's lives for sixteen years – travelling across various countries while working as a soldier, a hunter and more. His skills were legendary; tough, fast and lethal, he was not a man to cross. His initial search to find a connection to Jen led him into the dark world of drugs – the apparent kidnapper was a feared person who was known to stop at nothing to gain control over the drug trade in the west of the United States. The only thing in both Barr's and Jen's favour was that Jen was needed alive for something. But would he get to her in time?

Joining forces with a stubborn Allie, Barr was at first reluctant to put her in danger. But she had an agenda and wouldn't be fobbed off. Also she knew what the person they were after looked like. The race was on, but so were the continued attempts to stop them. The dangers were high – being alert 24/7 was tiring, but they had no choice. As they wound their way into the vast forests of Colorado, Barr felt confident; more at home in the wilderness than the cities. But had they underestimated their enemy? Barr knew that nothing short of dying would stop him finding the sister he was so close to when they were young...

Brilliant! So hard to believe *Nothing Short of Dying* is a debut novel by Erik Storey. Fast paced, original and full of action from the very first page, I raced through it. An excellent thriller, Barr is a great protagonist; his determination to succeed puts him in dangerous situations on a constant basis – and he doesn't always win! With this one being #1 in a new series, I'll be keen to read the next one. Highly recommended!

With thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for my copy to read in exchange for an honest review.

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## Mark Stevens says

At one point in time, the world was simply a “wide-open adventure” to Clyde Barr. A stint in the Merchant Marines. Camping across Africa at a time when he was “naïve but lucky.” Then “dreary jobs” like watching cows and building fences and digging wells. Then, hunting poachers in animal reserves and guiding safaris. And “helping the underdogs” in coups and revolutions, “picking the side I approved of.”

Not all went well, including a stint in a Mexican prison. Clyde Barr has “has seen evil on three continents.” But there’s one thing about Clyde Barr. When he gives someone a promise, “nothing short of dying” will prevent him from following through. When his sister calls, Clyde Barr hears a tone in her voice he doesn’t like, “the same tone and pleading I’d heard as a child on the bad nights. The nights that Mom and Dad—or Mom and some new guy—were fighting, or when one of those guys, drunk and out of control, chose to hurt us.”

So Clyde makes a promise. To help. To come get Jen.

As always, Clyde gets to pick the side he approves of. And this decision is a snap.

And Erik Storey’s “Nothing Short of Dying” begins its rocket ride around Western Colorado. Clyde is just a brother looking for a sister. Easy? Right?

The search starts in a bar called the Cellar in Clifton. “The place smelled of piss and mildew and stale beer. There was something else, too: the acrid sweat of the strung out—a smell that reminded me of the little cantina in Bolivia where people in the coca trade use booze to come down from the powder cloud that gets them through the long shifts. If broken souls had an odor, they’d smell like the Cellar.”

Clyde Barr is full of keen little observations like that one. And he’s not all bad boy. He’s got a pistol, a knife, a .375 Holland & Holland, sure. But then there are the paperbacks like the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche or the stories of H. Rider Haggard.

Clyde befriends a woman named Allie. He’s a bit of a knight-errant—and knows it. He takes his cues from childhood reading about Gawain, Perceval and Lancelot. The story winds to Rifle and the hills nearby. Clyde has an eye for “empty country—my favorite kind” but they are alternately chasing and being chased. Then it’s up the Yampa River Valley to Steamboat Springs and then onto Leadville; *Nothing Short of Dying* covers a big chunk of northwestern Colorado.

To beef up his team, Clyde pulls in a guy named Zeke. They had met in the prison in Mexico. Zeke killed two fellow prisoners with his bare hands and a prison guard with a shoelace garrote. Zeke was never caught because there was only one witness—Clyde. The result? Zeke, a guy who once “lost all interest in the human race,” owes Clyde. And Zeke enlists in Clyde’s mission, tempted in part by gaining access to any “spoils” from taking down a few sinister bad boys. One named Chopo and another named Alvis. There are gun fights, knife fights and fight fights. For every mess Clyde cleans up, he drags another with him.

Some of the scenes are Reacher-esque, but Clyde Barr is much less a cartoon than the Reacher’s impossible (but oh so fun) rumbles. Where Reacher travels with precious little, in fact, Clyde Barr drags every regret and mistake with him on every page. Fuel—motivation—is never in short supply.

“Nothing Short of Dying” is a big, sweeping, fast-paced thriller with guts. Push down the kickstarter on the

first few pages and take yourself for a ride with Clyde Barr, a man who knows himself very, very well. "The wild places....have the ability to send you deeper into your mind than you'd go if you were in a more civilized place. It's what makes those of us who spend most of our lives in the wilderness go crazy."

Yes, and Nietzsche said something along the lines of "stare into the abyss and the abyss stares back."

Clyde Barr returns the stare with action and purpose. It isn't always pretty, but the point isn't "how," it's "what."

Clyde Barr shows knows exactly how to get to that crazy place.

All he needs to do is pick the side that's worth fighting for.

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Q & A with Erik Storey on my blog: <https://markhstevens.wordpress.com/20...>

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### **Carolyn says**

Although Clyde Barr left his home and family in Colorado sixteen years ago, he can't help coming to his sister Jen's aid when she calls to say she has been kidnapped and is being held by a major drug ring. Clyde has been a soldier of fortune, fought in wars and more recently been incarcerated in Mexico. He knows how to fight and play dirty but underneath he has a basic honorable code of ethics and can recognise evil when he comes across it. This is a high octane adventure of the Jack Reacher type as Clyde attempts to rescue his sister, blow up a major drug racket and keep safe Allie, the girl he picked up along the way. Plenty of fast paced, gritty action in this excellent debut novel. I'll definitely be looking forward to what Mr Barr does next.

*With thanks to Netgalley and the publisher Simon & Schuster Australia for a digital copy to read and review*

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### **Larry H says**

I'd rate this 3.5, maybe 3.75 stars.

I don't know what it is about drifters, but thriller writers seem to love them as protagonists—Lee Child's Jack Reacher; Peter Ash, the title character in Nicholas Petrie's superb ***The Drifter*** (of all things); and now, Clyde Barr, from Erik Storey's debut novel, ***Nothing Short of Dying***—just to name a few. I guess the idea of someone with a shady, perhaps troubled past, yet nothing really to tie them down, provides an appealing canvas from which to create a story.

Clyde Barr has seen a lot in his life. A troubled adolescence led him to escape his Colorado home at a young age, seeking fortune and adventure elsewhere. As a hunter, soldier of fortune, and even a convict taking on anyone he sees as a threat, he's had more than his share of violence, death, and visions of destruction to last him a lifetime. He's ready to put the past behind him, and spend his days living off the land and sleeping in the mountains.

And then a phone call comes from his sister Jen, whom he has always sworn to protect since they were

growing up. Jen begs him to come and rescue her—and then the call abruptly ends. Memories of their shared hellish adolescence return. He doesn't know who has taken her, where she is, or even if she is still alive, but Clyde knows he has no choice but to hunt down those who have kidnapped his sister so he can bring her home, no matter what.

"Those who needed help always managed to find me, no matter where I hid. They tracked me down and pleaded. And I never refused. Somehow, that always caused bigger problems."

As Clyde struggles to determine Jen's whereabouts and the identity of her kidnappers, he unwittingly finds himself wading deeper and deeper into the middle of a narcotics ring run by a madman and his henchmen. Clyde is no stranger to violence or depravity, but these people stretch even his imagination. He connects with Allie, a bartender who has her own reasons for going on the run, and he looks up some old friends to help him find his sister. But who can he trust? And will finding Jen mean sacrificing his own life in exchange?

I found this book to be pretty compelling, and Clyde Barr is a really fascinating protagonist. He's got a penchant for fighting, a fairly strong threshold for pain, and a hair-trigger temper, which makes him a fun character to read about. This is Erik Storey's first novel, and I think he does a great job in developing his characters' backstories while keeping the action and suspense fairly taut and focused. Even if the plot isn't necessarily surprising, Storey keeps you reading, keeps you invested in what will happen to the characters.

I like thrillers but sometimes find them utterly implausible or not capable of sustaining my interest. *Nothing Short of Dying* is neither of these; it's well-told, takes off at breakneck speed, and doesn't really look back. Definitely a worthy entry in the genre.

NetGalley and Scribner 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.blogspot.com>....

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