



## Able One

*Ben Bova*

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When a nuclear missile launched by a rogue North Korean faction explodes in space the resulting shockwave destroys the world's satellites, throwing global communication into chaos. The United States military satellites, designed to withstand such an assault, show that two more missiles are sitting on the launch pad in North Korea, ready to be deployed. Faced with the threat of a thermonuclear attack, the United States has only one possible defense: Able One.

ABL-1, or Able One, is a modified 747 fitted with a high-powered laser able to knock out missiles in flight. But both the laser's technology and the jet's crew are untested. What was originally to be a training flight with a skeleton crew turns into a desperate race to destroy the two remaining nukes. Will Able One's experimental technology be enough to prevent World War III—especially when it becomes clear that a saboteur is onboard?

*Able One* is a timely thrill-ride by one of science fiction's most respected novelists.

## **Able One Details**

Date : Published February 2nd 2010 by Tor Books (first published February 1st 2010)

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Author : Ben Bova

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## From Reader Review Able One for online ebook

### **Jordan Lyons says**

Sci fi often predicts certain tech advancements but this one felt like it was predicting an actual scenario that could happen tomorrow. Fast paced and decently interesting characters.

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### **Drew says**

‘Able One’ is a suspense novel which takes the reader through various aspects of a potential nuclear war but only shows part of the picture focusing on only the US portion and leaving the reader to guess what’s happening behind other closed doors. Most of the story takes place aboard the US Airforce plane tasked with shooting down the incoming missiles if they are launched and the strife within the cabin most of which seemed pretty petty, so it can’t really be called an international thriller. In addition the side plot of the family stuck in a snow storm seems a bit useless and doesn’t really add anything to the plot. I’m not sure what the author was trying to accomplish there. The writing is fine but he seems to like to use racial slurs at every turn but then wont let the USAF officers swear, so it seems like he’s just trying to use it as shock value but he uses it too much so it gets old very fast. In addition I listened to the audiobook which needs some more editing as at least once per hour there is a sentence that is repeated as if the narrator was doing another take and it didn’t get edited out.

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### **Amoxy Mox says**

Been enjoying Bova lately, but this books seems like it was written in the '50's instead of the 21st century. Thin plot, racist and sexist slurs. Just not an easy read

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### **Bill says**

#### **AUDIBLE BOOK**

north korea sets off a nuke in orbit that knocks out satellites.  
the us sends a test laser plane to destroy suspected nuclear launch against the us

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### **Virginia says**

This was...not a good book. I picked this up because I heard the author give a talk about developing the laser featured in this book - and I really wish this had been nonfiction, because the talk was interesting, but the book was not, for two reasons: characters and plot. The science was okay. I kept wanting to tell the author that it would be okay to write a book about lasers and have it be non-fiction. The characters and plot seemed pasted on.

I ended up hating every single character that was introduced, which was unfortunate, because it seemed as though there were thousands of them. This may be because I just finished reading this article: Ten Rules for Writing Fiction Books, but it grated on me that this book violated practically every single rule. It was irritating that people were constantly referred to by their whole names, first and last. The physical appearance of each character was covered in microscopic detail, but their personalities and motivations vis a vis the plot were given short shrift.

The plot involved some political machinations and sabotage, but it was never clear what the motivations were for sabotage in the first place. The ending was so predictable, it was practically visible from chapter one.

I listened to the audiobook version of this, which was also not great. The reader spoke in a monotone and had a habit of inserting awkward pauses that made me think the disk was over. (I was not looking at the display, since I was driving.)

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### **Mallory Clancy says**

Some story lines were pointless

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### **Matthew Ciarvella says**

The promise of an interesting geopolitical thriller is undone by clumsy characterization, relentless racial slurs employed by seemingly every member of the overly large cast, an irritating tendency to constantly refer to people by their full names, and a characterization of women (primarily in the form of Sylvia) that was so irritating it was a distraction even when the action was focused on something else. The other female characters were little more than cardboard cutouts without any real personality other than "Female Pilot" and "Japanese-American Engineer." The male characters weren't much better either. Then there were the wandering plot threads that did absolutely nothing.

What was the point of the guy (Ingersol, I think?) that gets stuck in the car with his family during a blizzard and tries to walk through the snow to get a tow truck? If it was an attempt to show how badly normal people were affected by the loss of the satellites, thanks, we already grasped that from the complaining of virtually every other character. It was just one more thing to muddle through. Speaking of Sylvia, the fact that she's flying into a city that might get nuked is completely undone once the missiles are shot down and we never hear from her again. We don't even get her reaction to events. What's the point of her being here, except to fill pages?

The biggest letdown, though, was the fact that we spent the entire book hearing about how this one rogue analyst has a crazy theory that North Korea will be targeting San Francisco (and the President who will be giving a speech there) but we never get any confirmation or denial if that threat was real. We never really find out why anything actually happened the way that it did; all the theories are hinted at, it's suggested that China was behind North Korea's actions, but it's never confirmed or even supported beyond mere "yeah, it could have been that, but I guess we'll never know."

Even the saboteur plot line falls flat and we're given neither motivation nor reason for why the person did

what he (or she) did beyond some vaguely defined jealousy at a promotion that happened months in the past from the book's present.

Based on my interest in Korean geopolitics, I was expecting this book to be a lot more than it was. I was hoping that the intriguing premise (Kim Jong Il dies, factions break out in civil war) would deliver some interesting fictional versions of how that transition of power could have gone down, compared to the relatively benign transition to Kim Jong Un.

Instead, there was a plot that surprised absolutely no one (missiles are fired, experimental laser shoots them down) and far more racial slurring than anything else. I get the idea that some people are politically incorrect and that military characters do stuff like that all the time . . . but when your timid, every-man, supposedly heroic engineer is doing it too, it feels less like an attempt at verisimilitude and more like something being done just to do it.

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## **PSXtreme says**

As time goes on for me, I'm finding that I enjoy Ben Bova's work less and less as the years pass. Back in my High School days, I thought his works were OUTSTANDING. Books like Privateers and Voyagers had my mind reeling and I just had to go out and find everything I could by him. Lately though the politics in his language, and the seemingly sloppy research and weak plot development, have just been turning my interest in his works aside. This latest read is just another nail in the author's proverbial coffin.

To begin with, I listened to the audiobook version of this title and I must say the editor did a VERY POOR job of editing out the re-read errors from the audio. There were at least 10 places where the narrator made an error and then re-read a sentence and it was not corrected in the studio. Although this has no ill reflection upon the author, or the final score, it was some rather sloppy work by Blackstone Audio.

However, now let's get to actual criticisms of the author's work. To begin with, I really don't understand why Bova thinks that every military member is a racist and speaks in a derogatory manner when referring to people of differing cultures. The continual usage of the terms "Gook," "Chink," and "Nip" were rather over-the-top and completely unrealistic. That terminology went out of common usage back during the Carter Administration (circa 1970s), so unless Mr. Bova was having acid flashbacks he really needs to update his military jargon.

Another failure was his lack of knowledge concerning military aeronautics and their standards, operation procedures and equipment. Obviously, he never watched the movie "Air Force One" <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0118571/?>... which showed the 20-year-old defensive technology that would have been available for any military 747 when this book was written and definitely would have been included for any high-tech flying missile shield. Furthermore, the failure of the military to have a standard two-plane CAP (Combat Aircraft Patrol) for a high-profile military asset is unheard of and then the refusal to send a defense force by the President when a military asset is under threat of force is only something that has happened during the Obama Administration. The emergency landing procedures (gear up vs. partial gear down were questionable), the worrying of the environmental impact by dumping fuel of the air traffic controller when the pilot declares an emergency, along with the lack of foam on the runway during the landing, were also obvious discrepancies.

The characters in themselves seemed rather one-dimensional and shallow. Most of the male characters were whiny girly-men and almost all of the female personages were nothing more than panting bags of hormones. I was personally surprised that they just didn't flop down on their backs, throw their legs in the air and start shouting "Do Me! Do Me!" like Robert Downey Jr. in "Back to School." [https://youtu.be/vNhD-NW\\_IXs](https://youtu.be/vNhD-NW_IXs)

I really wanted to like this book. The idea in itself was fantastic and the global situation it created provided a plethora of unexplored possibilities. Unfortunately none of them came true. This one is recommended only if you've completely run out of books to read, this one is the last book on your shelf, you've been hit by a 100-year blizzard and the power goes out. Other than that situation, I'd recommend re-reading the ingredient list on your shampoo bottle for the 1000th time instead.

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### **Kate says**

Ugh. Interesting premise, but the characters are all racist, idiots, or can't keep their pants zipped.

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### **Mary Ellen Grace says**

suspenseful. I felt drawn in to all the characters. well-told story from the perspectives of multiple characters.

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### **Maria Christensen says**

Halfway through this book it is painfully (as in hit you over the head with a cast-iron skillet) obvious that while Bova's technology is up-to-date, his cultural and emotional references are stuck somewhere between the 1950s and early 1980s. I'll finish it because I always finish books I start (it's my \*thing\*), but the hideously racist anachronisms are getting to me. Yes, absolutely, racism still exists, but in a different form than Bova portrays. Gooks? Spics? Really? Then there's the woman who is a "preppy socialite" and my favorite so far: a "Buck Rogers fantasy." He really should have used a Star Trek or Star Wars reference there.

As I said before, Bova is out of date and has clearly failed to keep up with culture in this modern age and it's ruining what could be a good story. This reads like a script for a really bad D-List late night SyFy movie. What worked well for him 30 years ago - and all the other great writers during that time period - just doesn't cut it any more.

Update: Finished. The book is disjointed, unsympathetic and so riddled with stereotypes, cliches and outdated cultural references it's impossible to enjoy.

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### **Jason says**

A fun book in some ways, but it's written like a made-for-tv thriller. Lots of short short chapters cutting away to 3 different plot lines that tie together in different ways. But the characters are kind of flat and there is one set of characters that have NOTHING to do with the story other than to show the reader how the average person might be affected by the events unfolding in the world, and a couple of minor plot lines that aren't

tied up or answered - Bova spends a lot of time having the main character's estranged wife and kids get to a certain city...then he deals with the threat against that city and never returns to those characters to see how they feel when things are announced. Or why someone sabotaged the laser in the first place - they show how the main character figures out who it was but never answer why that character did what he did or he was working for. All together it really feels like a made-for-tv movie that was then reverse engineered into a book. I usually love Bova's hard science but this one is lacking.

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## **Bryan says**

Ben Bova is one of the last of the older group of SF stalwarts still writing at a prolific rate. He's done a lot for SF in a variety of roles. And he's on my list of authors of whom I buy everything I see.

But Bova hasn't ever given me a perfect novel. I've liked everything I've read, but they were "ok" or "decent" - very few were "amazing". One factor in Bova's favor: unlike other aging SF writers, Bova hasn't filled his books with sex.

The last 2 I've read weren't even marketed as Sf: The Green Trap and Able One were published by Tor as mainstream techno-thrillers. I gave away The Green Trap on Bookmooch, but I think I'll keep Able-One. (Bought it several times: 2 ebook versions and a paperback, although 1 ebook was refunded.)

Able One deals with a fascinating real-world premise: using a massive onboard laser to allow an aircraft the ability to shoot down enemy missiles as part of SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative). This really captivated me, and the details included were more than satisfying. The main plot of foiling a rogue faction's plans to attack USA was fine too, and seemed very timely.

But once again Bova seemed unable to distinguish the book further. Both this one and The Green Trap seem like Bova is catering to an audience he doesn't have: fans of made-for-tv thriller flicks.

Here's the pros of Able One:

- cool lasers
- interesting scenarios of contemporary warfare (via missiles) and defense needs
- decent characterization

Here are some cons:

- some shocking racial slurs (seemingly anachronisms but this book is current)
- street-level perspective of the main events is supplied by throw-away characters whom we never see again or who are otherwise unconnected
- the sabotage onboard ABL-1 seems too contrived. Bova does work it out well, but at the time it's unsatisfying and feels like it was inevitable that one more source of conflict would certainly need to be included.

Worth a read. Likely a 3-star read at most for the majority of folks. I'm a bit loyal to Bova and find comfort in the familiarity of his work.

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## **Kay says**

This is a real nail biter. Keeps you on the edge of your seat all the way.

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## **Chris Hubbs says**

I've been a big fan of Bova's scifi, so I went ahead and picked this one up when I saw it on the library shelf. This is Bova's foray into the military thriller genre, and, after reading it, my conclusion is that he should leave that genre to Larry Bond, Dale Brown, et al, and stick to writing sci-fi.

The plot was thin, the characters flat, the story just interesting enough to keep reading without actually being fascinating enough to be engaging. Not particularly recommended.

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