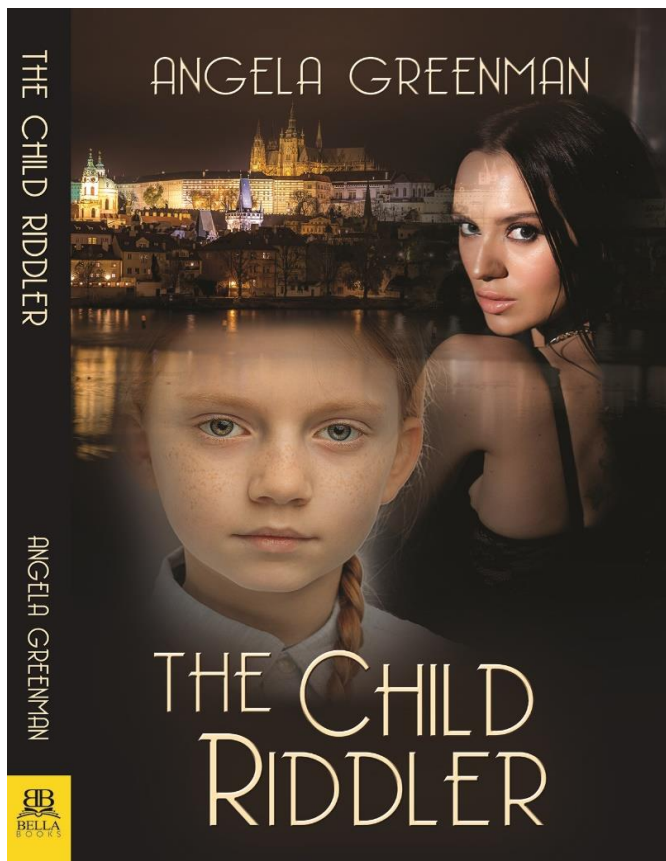




The Child Riddler, a Slick Spy Thriller by Angela Greenman



The Bottom Line:

A slick spy thriller that balances a futuristic counter-terrorism mission with the battle for its heroine's soul.

By Mishka Rao July 17, 2022
bestthrillers.com

Zoe Lorel is an elite operative in an international spy agency called Global Threat Assessment (GTA). The GTA faces an increasingly sprawling network of malevolent organizations that includes ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Hamas, the Real IRA, the KKK and others. Zoe's boss and uncle, Easton Hughes, calls the collective evil a "worldwide extremist infection." Easton believes the top threat to civilization's survival is a powerful cloaking technology. Unfortunately, the world's first "invisibility weapon" has fallen into Iranian hands.

To get the code needed to control the technology, Easton orders Zoe to abduct Leah, the nine-year-old daughter of the Greek billionaire who sold it to Iran. Zoe is no stranger to violence,

having killed the girls' father. But the idea of kidnapping and interrogating the girl crosses an ethical line – even if Zoe doesn't seem to quite know where that line is. But Zoe also knows that kidnapping the girl may be the only way to keep her safe from others vying for the cloaking technology.

While author Angela Greenman has created a high-concept plot that would be entertaining enough on its own terms, *The Child Riddler* soars when it's grappling with the question of self-determination. Like Seth Lockhead's Hanna and Robert Ludlum's Jason Bourne, Zoe was not necessarily destined to become a fearsome killer. She was instead trained and manipulated from a young age to become the GTA's top operative. But author Angela Greenman has created a truly mesmerizing character in Zoe, who, unlike Hanna and Bourne, seems to be largely aware of who and what she is.

In the early going, Zoe recalls painful memories at Woodbury Boarding School, where she endured significant physical abuse en route to becoming fluent in six languages. And all with the approval of creepy Uncle Easton, who affectionately calls her "Wildcat" (also her GTA code name) even as he prescribes drugs that give her "an infusion of ruthlessness" prior to an operation. All the while, she clearly adores and admires Uncle Easton, even while his oft-repeated phrase – that's my girl – seems to make her increasingly queasy.

The book's conscience is Zoe's fiancé, Isabel, whose pleas for Zoe to get therapy inject romantic and professional tension into the story. At times, Isabel is clearly in a battle for the life she and Zoe want together. At others, she's in a battle for nothing less than Zoe's soul. Zoe's decision to transfer to GTA's Albuquerque office adds additional suspense, a decision that threatens to drive a wedge in the family business. All the while, Greenman ensures that the relationships and actions between Zoe, Isabel, Easton and Leah are anything but predictable. *The Child Riddler* keeps readers gripped and guessing until the very end.