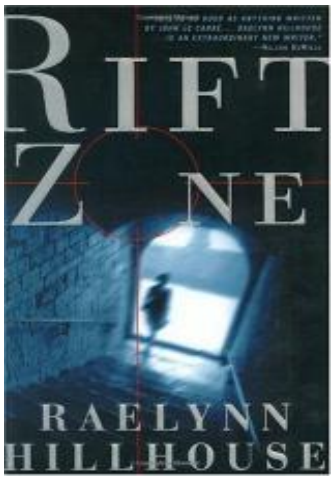
ReadingGroupGuides
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Rift Zone

by Raelynn Hillhouse



About the Book

In the turbulent years after the rise of the Berlin Wall, Germany stood dangerously divided between freedom and Communism. Dodging border patrols and guard posts, a silent few were able to cross the borders of the Iron Curtain to deliver needed supplies, always at the risk of their own lives.

This is the past Faith Whitney knew. The daughter of Bible smuggler, Faith was raised on the danger that such a life brought with it, a danger that can rip lives apart, even that of a mother and daughter. Now grown and living in 1989 Germany, Faith continues to smuggle goods across the border, narrowly slipping by the East German Stasi each time.

But her activities haven't gone unnoticed. The Stasi have recruited her to deliver a package to Moscow, a package that must be delivered within forty-eight hours . . . or Faith will be eliminated. Her payment: the long-desired location of her missing father. The danger mounts as Faith is secretly contacted by the beautiful and seductive Colonel Bogdanov of the KGB, who also wants the package at any cost. Barely surviving harsh interrogations, and unsure of whom to trust, Faith turns to her ex-fiancée, Naval Officer Max Summer, the only man with the know-how to get her and her delivery to Moscow in one piece. On the run, the more they discover about the package, the more they realize that delivering it will likely cost them their lives. Little do they both know that the package is part of a larger plan, one that could affect the result of the Cold War in ways no one ever imagined.

Discussion Guide

1. In the novel, the Berlin Wall almost didn?t fall. What would our world be like had the Berlin Wall never fallen? Was the world a safer place during the Cold War or now?

2. Rift Zone opens with Faith?s mother using her as a child to smuggle a Bible into the Soviet Union. Have you ever known someone to use their children to help them achieve an elusive goal? What effect do you think this has on the child

when she is grown?

3. Faith takes great risks trafficking contraband through the Iron Curtain. What motivates her to take such chances? Is there any relation between this behavior and unresolved family issues?

4. The only thing Faith has from her father is the note, "We never had a chance, but we made one for ourselves." What does this mean?

5. Even as late as 1989 it seemed inconceivable that a Warsaw Pact state like East Germany could meddle in the affairs of the Soviet Union. Is it possible that another NATO government would try to manipulate domestic affairs in the United States? Is this more or less conceivable after German and French opposition to American policy in Iraq? Do you think American Allies spy on the US?

6. Everything in **Rift Zone** seems so real. Sometimes too real. What parts of it do you think were taken directly from the author?s own experience?

7. Summer became a hero, preventing the assassination of a foreign head of state. Did he do the right thing? Should a US military officer not acting on orders become involved in the affairs of another country? What if they can prevent the assassination of a leader?

8. How did Faith change over the course of the novel? Why? How did her mother change?

9. The novel is set in May 1989 --- six months before the Berlin Wall collapses. What do you think Faith is going to do when the Wall is no longer there? What kinds of dilemmas will this pose for her? For Margaret, the Bible smuggler? For Kosyk, the Stasi General? Who will make the transition to the post-communist world the most easily? Who will have the hardest time?

Author Bio

Raelynn Hillhouse
has been recruited as a spy by both Libyan and East German intelligence services. (They failed.) A former professor and Fulbright fellow, she's not only faced the barrels of Kalashnikovs, but has also been caught in the crossfire of border guards' snowball fights.

Hillhouse earned her M.A. in Russian and East European studies and her Ph.D. in political science at the University of Michigan. She completed her undergraduate degree in history and German area studies at Washington University in St. Louis. She has published articles about Eastern Europe in major academic journals and has lectured at such prestigious institutions as Harvard, the Smithsonian Institution, Soviet Academy of Sciences, among others. She speaks several languages, including German, French and Russian. She is a member of the Association for Former Intelligence Officers. RIFT ZONE is her first novel.

? **Debut**
Suspense/Thriller Series Feature

Critical Praise

"Hillhouse's gripping debut, a cold war thriller, has so many unexpected pleasures.... The book may be better for its two strong women and its incisive picture of a significant era in recent history than for its thriller elements, but Hillhouse is a welcome new voice. The zing of true-to-life adventures plus big name blurbs (DeMille, Cussler, Gerritsen, etc.) might make this a hit."

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