

Gulf War novel offers intrigue, speculation

by Colin MacDonald

When our normally rational minds are presented with an idea that seems somewhat implausible, most of us will close off our brains to any argument that supports the idea. In *American Hero* the author, Larry Beinhart, continuously feeds us information that when mixed in with a combination of action, adventure and intrigue, produces a fascinating novel.

BOOKS
American Hero
Larry Beinhart
Pantheon Books

American Hero is set during the time between George Bush's presidential election and the start of the Gulf War. To attempt to sum up the novel's plot in just one line would do the book an injustice, as there are essentially two storylines. One is a third-person view of the steps involved in the American government's deliberate staging of the Gulf War in an attempt to boost the President's approval rating and get him re-elected.

The second plot is a first-person narrative involving Joe Broz, a former marine now working for a high-tech security firm in California. His storyline deals with his relationship with a client who is a Hollywood starlet, Magdalena Lazlo. While working for her, Joe discovers his company has already been keep-

ing tabson Magdalena without informing him. This is something that piques his curiosity and makes him investigate his own bosses. The two plots start quite far apart, but gradually come together in such a way that is both predictable and riveting at the same time.

The novel is strong in quite a few areas. The main and secondary characters are well developed, especially Joe Broz. The story moves quickly from one plotline to the other, giving us just enough of one plot to keep us excited before pulling us to the other plot and doing the same to us there. Throughout the story, little bits of humour are inserted. Most of it comes from the characters of George Bush and Secretary of State Jim Baker, both of whom say things that we would not expect them to express in real life.

This brings us to the best part of the book: the footnotes. For almost every questionable remark made by Bush and Baker, the author supports their comment with direct quotations from the real-life character that fall into the same vein as what the novel's characters have said. Through the footnotes that solidify any shaky statements, to a list of 39 thought-provoking questions at the end of the novel, Beinhart takes the outlandish idea of a staged Gulf War directed by Hollywood and turns it into a very possible proposition that begs the question: what if?

There are a few negatives, though, that must be pointed out. The previ-

ously mentioned dual plotline can be very confusing at first. Once the reader gets through the first 50 pages, the switching between plotlines becomes much easier as well as making more and more sense. The two plots also move at different speeds which does

not help a reader who picks up a book and only peruses a few pages at a time. Also, the novel ends rather oddly. After bringing the two storylines together, the book wraps up very quickly, leaving a few loose ends that never get tied up.

This book will not broaden your

mind, tell you how to make thousands of dollars, or tug at the heartstrings. However, if you enjoy humorous presidents, tough ex-marines, and government conspiracy, then this is your kind of book.

Neptune drama draws praise

by Leslie J Furlong

It is often quite remarkable to see what can capture the public's attention. Sometimes, when the world looms large and dark over the lives of everyone, maybe it's easier to focus on just the smallest portion of it in order to express one's outrage with the whole. Anyway, it's just my own little theory, and maybe it helps me to place *The Winslow Boy* in its proper context.

THEATRE
The Winslow Boy
Neptune Theatre
Nov. 5 - 24

Neptune Theatre's second production of its thirtieth season is an uplifting drama based on real life events in the years just prior to the First World War. Young Ronnie Winslow, played by Patrick Lundrigan, has returned home from the Naval Academy, expelled for stealing a postal order even

though a proper trial was never carried out. This seeming injustice is what prompts the boy's father, Arthur Winslow, played by David Renton, to embark on a two-year crusade to prove his son's innocence. He's supported most strongly by his daughter Catherine (Alison Woolridge), a Suffragette who cannot stand for any sort of injustice, regardless of a person's guilt or innocence. As the case progresses, the attention it receives snowballs as the population of England seeks a diversion from the chaos brewing on the continent.

As the attention does grow, the burden of the case grows even heavier upon the Winslow family. The mounting costs of the case mean that sacrifices have to be made by all in the family, some unwillingly, while other members have to make perhaps even more costly sacrifices for a cause that many do not see as being worth the price. As the boy has been able to go on with his own life, the audience becomes unsure as to whether or not the case is being

pursued merely out of Arthur's pride.

A play such as this one could have fallen into the trap of melodrama and cliché, and credit must be given to each of the actors for their performances. Though truly excellent all around, the most notable were the comic relief of Joan Orenstein as the parlour maid Violet and the kick-ass-and-take-names solicitor Sir Robert Morton portrayed by Jim Mezon.

Final praise must be saved for the playwright himself. Terence Rattigan is a fairly new name to me, and it is a pet peeve of mine that there is never an author's bio in the program. It is his words that provide the engine for this engaging and often very funny play, and he has been able to provide a set of eleven characters that are all personality with no fat weighing them down.

Regardless of who wrote the play, the play still is, and to not see it would be yet another injustice to both Neptune and yourself. I guess you could say I liked it.

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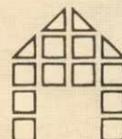
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