



The Reluctant Colonel

Michael James Merry

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In the late 1950's, the United States finally started to pay attention to what was happening in Latin America. The revolution in Cuba was gathering steam and very soon, a committed communist regime would be operating less than one hundred miles from its coastline. It was imperative to keep an eye on this potential menace and as relations with Panama became worse, the US military was anxious to secure a base from which Castro's island could be kept under observation. It's 1964. A Latin country south of Panama with a huge international business presence is under the thumb of a corrupt dictator. Maraguay has a deep-water harbor and an island air strip which is leased to the United States. The treaty is up for renewal. The dictator stands to collect a huge chunk of the money the US is offering for a new agreement. Officers of the Armed Forces and Daniel Montego, the senior cadet from the military academy, plot a coup. Key to success is cutting all communications to prevent the U.S. from getting news of the coup and sending troops from Panama to intervene. Friends of the cadet leader who work at the country's franchised telegraph company are recruited to help. By default, they become deeply involved as the Coup succeeds. Death and injury during the battle to take over the military headquarters, find the senior cadet at the head of the junta. When the dust clears, multinational businesses operating in the country demand that the treaty bid open to all comers. The new Junta agrees to their demands and issues invitations to bid to the world's leading powers. George MacGregor, a young friend of the new leader is named to negotiate the treaty. He deals with Castro, Roa, Rusk and Johnson and these historical figures are resurrected as they meet in Cuba and at the LBJ ranch in Texas where an unusual compromise is reached. The inner workings of a coup, and how it affects both participants and the general population, are revealed. Meanwhile, millions stolen by the ex-dictator and his friends are tracked to their secret hiding places and strangely enough, are used by the coup leaders to further their aims of returning the government to a civilian power and establish a trusted relationship with the population. The story is interspersed with the hilarious personal tales of one of the key coup participants.

The Reluctant Colonel Details

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From Reader Review The Reluctant Colonel for online ebook

Sandie says

I selected and ordered The Reluctant Colonel. Upon delivery, my husband confiscated the book before I even had a chance to peruse the first page. He began reading, and was not seen or heard from for a day and a half. Upon completing his read, he said "This is a fantastic book and it would make an incredible movie". WOW, this from a man who is not a reader. With a recommendation like that, how could I not begin reading immediately. Two days later, I surfaced red eyed from reading the 618 page tome but totally in agreement with my better half. This is one great read and with the right director and cast would make a phenomenal movie.

In the mythical country of Maraguay a dozen or so individuals plan a coup to overthrow the current DeSantos regime. (As with most of the banana republics, DeSantos had commandeered power from the previous civilian government). In return for turning a blind eye to DeSantos power play and paying him large sums of money, the US is allowed exclusive use of the strategically located Maraguay harbor.

By severing all communications, the coup leaders George, Felipe and Daniel are able to oust DeSantos while keeping the US ignorant of their clever scheme. The ensuing re-negotiations for harbor access by the new government involves power players from Cuba, England, France and the US. It should be noted that this novel could serve as an instruction manual on the ease with which foreign countries extract millions in aid from the United States without agreeing with its foreign policy

Although Merry has set his novel in the 1950's it is easy to see that his observations concerning the importance of skillful political maneuvering and negotiation could easily apply to the world situation today; and while he has a field day poking fun at the political scene, he is able to do so while resisting the mean spirited cynicism that abounds in today's media.

Through Merry's three protagonists we are allowed to participate in every aspect of their lives from the hazards of revolution to their amorous encounters. Yep, this is definitely a movie waiting to be made.

Matthew Kresal says

Michael James Merry sets out in The Reluctant Colonel to create an epic story. This is from judging from the novel not only by page length but by the story itself. Yet for its six hundred plus page length, The Reluctant Colonel is a fast read and one of the better books I read during 2008.

Merry certainly creates a broad canvas to set his novel upon. Merry creates a fictional (yet somehow familiar) Latin American country called Maraguay. Unlike many others, Merry actually makes his fictional country seem real to the point one may well go to a map and look for it. It is in the descriptions of Maraguay that The Reluctant Colonel comes alive in the best way. In particular the section of the novel depicting the coup itself makes for some excellent reading for its action while the stories of Felipe make for some humorous reading at times. In short, Merry puts his years in South America to good use and the novel is all the better for it.

Merry also succeeds in creating a rather interesting bunch of characters. They include George McGregor (who seems to be quite a bit on Merry himself), the story filled Felipe Fernandez and Daniel Montego. It is through them (and a few others) that Merry plays out the drama unfolding in the novel. They are, for the most part, believable and (to a point of course) even likeable characters.

This isn't to say this is a novel without flaws. The truth of the matter is that *The Reluctant Colonel* has quite a few flaws in it. The biggest one is the occasional use of clunky dialogue. There are moments but especially in exposition when Merry tends to seem to loose his gift for portraying fiction so close to real life. The biggest example that sticks out in my mind is the whole section of exposition about Sten guns in the lead up to the coup which seemed unnecessary and brought the tension of the novel to a grinding halt but Merry manages to pick up the pace but the effect is still jarring none the less. There is also the matter of Felipe's stories. While the stories are humorous for the most part, on closer examination they seem to actually get in the way of the story for the most part.

Yet for its flawed dialogue and occasional misplacing of humorous stories, there is plenty to like about this novel. From the epic canvas it plays out on to its characters, this novel sets out to tell an epic story and succeeds for the most part. It is a fictional drama that seems so real at times that one is sometimes left wondering just where Merry draws the line between fact and fiction. In fact *The Reluctant Colonel* is one of the most under read novels of 2008.
