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David Mingolla soon learns that escape from the rotten jungles of Guatemala is impossible – he is once more a pawn of secret, ruthless forces lusting for world domination. They try to dominate David by ordering him to kill the woman he loves.

Life During Wartime Details

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Author : Lucius Shepard

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From Reader Review Life During Wartime for online ebook

Binjamin says

The beginning third was excellent, introducing the bizzare Vietnam-esque war in Central America. Drug addled grunts and psychic soldiers fight a surreal and horrific war, and Shepard's writing does a wonderful job illustrating the insanity of war in his poetic prose. Eventually though, I felt like this book just wandered off somewhere never quite as interesting. While there are both beautiful and horrific sections throughout, I felt like there was quite a lot of filler and somewhat forced romance. The short story this was expanded from, Salvador, was much more focused (as it had to be) but I think it captured all that needed to be captured, and this expansion doesn't really add anything substantial. Still, there are some great moments and brilliant ideas here.

Karl says

Shepard's second book. A bit on the political side. But great nun-the-less.

Justine says

I originally rated this 4 stars, but on reflection, I raised it to 5.

I feel like I should say something about this book because it was a such a very compelling read. It was one of those books that was almost surreal because while I was reading it I did not really know exactly where it was going, but that was actually OK. It isn't really a war story, psychic or otherwise. It is more of a story of self discovery and love. The protagonist is incredibly flawed, but that makes him all the more human and believable. Instead of becoming increasingly filled with self-loathing as his power over others increases, he instead learns from his (many) errors in judgment and personal failings and becomes stronger and more filled with hope by the end of the book.

I also have to comment on the the writing, which was of absolute unparalleled quality. There were passages in this book which were almost lyrical in nature. Shepard is a master at communicating experience, whether it be sensual or divine, violent or loving, ugly or transcendent. This is a richly told, if often violent and harsh tale, filled with characters that live and die like no others.

Colleen says

Takes place in an alternative future in Central America where a years long war is being waged. The story follows Mingolla, a disaffected US soldier, who is trying to find some hope and maybe even love in the bars and whorehouses in towns near the war front. Technology and drugs enhance the soldiers' skills. His parents back home in New York can't understand, and the war isn't something civilians care about. He's a bit psychic - lucks into a bunch of weird situations. His friends want to desert and go free in the jungle. Very interesting tale, and you don't know where it's going or really why the war is being waged. Well told tale.

Ben Loory says

shepard is a stylist, a visionary, a dramatist, and a philosopher; he's got it all and it's all incredible. the only thing wrong with this book is that it feels like seven or eight novellas stitched together... and so from here i go to his actual novellas... where i probably should've started to begin with.

Ignacio says

Durante cerca de 200 páginas he leído Vida en tiempo de guerra sin tener ni idea de hacia dónde iba. Aterrizas en una centroamérica futura que es básicamente la de los 80, saturada de guerras de guerrillas, y te mueves con su protagonista según conoce personajes, escucha sus relatos y vive alguna situación tensa. Sin embargo a ritmo de perezoso se vislumbra la dirección en la que avanza. Primero en lo que se refiere al crecimiento de ese soldado que participa en la contienda sin motivación alguna y descubre un propósito más allá de vivir al día; un camino durante el cual pasa de comportarse de manera egoísta, sin prestar atención a cómo consigue sus fines, a tratar como seres humanos a las víctimas de un conflicto que ha arrasado la zona durante generaciones. Y después en su retrato de la contienda como si fuera un Gran Guñol donde la voluntad de unos pocos ha impuesto el horror a millones de personas, escindidas en dos bloques (orden vs justicia social) mantenidos de manera artificial a través de una narrativa que ya forma parte de sus credos personales.

La novela es densa, tiene a perderse en tiempos muertos o descripciones hermosas aunque un tanto reiterativos, pero Shepard siempre acierta con el diálogo o la pequeña historia para recuperar el tono. Un gran título de ciencia ficción bélica con, al menos, el mismo valor de Tropas del espacio o La guerra interminable.

Bradley says

It's going to be very hard to describe this work as anything other than genius.

Almost from the very start, I found myself slowing down and being dragged into the hellish nightmare of war and such densely imaginative prose that I discovered that there was nothing left for me except to become completely submerged and try to breathe the canned air that Shepard provided. I became Mingolla. I began seeing patterns in the very fabric of reality that might help me survive his life. I became paranoid. I grasped at any and all straws. I grasped at Debora, who was just as fucked as me.

What really blew me away was the way the stories appeared like bullet holes ripping spaces in the mist, swirling and leaving deep impressions that made a whole that was much, much grander than trying to survive the feuding families that had torn apart South and Middle America, or even coming to grips with the immense implications of so much mindfuckery. I loved the stories within stories within stories. We were treated with a dive within the mind's labyrinth, the Mayan king on one hand and the ghost of the conquistador on the other, laughing in insane merriment as they drove a whole world into an excess of dissolution and hate, marked mainly by the burning embers of obsessive hope and love.

My god, what an intense and immensely crazy ride this was. Rabbit-hole crazy. And I had no choice except to fall deep within its labyrinth. It's a mark of a truly fantastic tale when it grabs me so tight and surprises me with tears, anguish, hope, disillusionment, anger, more anger, a seething cauldron of anger, and finally, love. Is it real love? Hell if I know. Remember, I've become Mingolla. Maybe he's right. Maybe the world is completely insane and the only thing we can do is cling to each other, making whatever damn sense we can of the moment as we change with each other, and pray that we can hold a sense of the eventual and far-off understanding for safe-keeping, and that we still retain that last tiny ray of hope after we've arrived.

So damn beautiful. This novel is poetry. It should never be entered into without knowing the risks.

It's an important and brilliant piece of literature. Period. It deserves your complete attention, kiddies. This is no fluff. This is no popcorn. This can be, potentially, life-changing.

I've always hated war. I've never even particularly enjoyed the best that movies or other fiction have provided. But here's the brutal truth: While I hate war, this novel has shown me a special kind of horrible beauty that I'm unlikely to ever forget.

Like the mad-painter and his gorgeous murals that he'd booby-trap to destroy any potential admirer, and destroy the work itself in the process. It's crazy. It's also one hell of a statement of Art.

Shepard's own conversation in the field of literature is more of a gigantic fuck-you to all the writers out there who think they've ever gotten close to telling a Truth. This guy can WRITE, damn it, but whatever he touches, circles, and swoops-in to illuminate, he then shells with artillery.

Fucking amazing shit.

I remember this author from the Eighties being a part of the cyberpunk movement, but that characterization is completely unfair and not worth setting up. He's got maybe a few connections, the seeding of tech and immense discomfort, but beyond this, we've got a masterpiece of storytelling that goes beyond most pigeonholing. He's a force of nature.

I'm never forgetting this work.

Maggie K says

Wow. Trippy thought provoking ode to the frivolity of power....with a sense of place like no other. I have come to believe that Lucius Shepard is a genius!

Set in a war in the Guatemalan jungle, A soldier is pulled into a scheme of dueling clans of mind-control using the distraction of war to dominate....

The sense of place is astounding, the characters deep. I kept having to put the book down because I was tripping up, feeling like I was THERE.

Wow.

Outis says

This evocative and whimsical book is remarkable in more than one way.

It meanderingly plays with facile thrills, pulpish manly antics, vulgarity, the grotesque and the nonsensical but remains essentially serious and meaningful.

The plot seems disjointed and is often aimless but in the end I thought (unlike some reviewers) that Shepard managed to pull his stuff together and that that resolution was provided. I may have missed the significance of some of the happenings but I think some of the most repetitive over-the-top vignettes and angsty outbursts could nevertheless have profitably been edited out.

About those vignettes, there are some seriously awesome scenes in this book. The crazy sort of awesome. It'd almost be worth reading for a handful of the best.

The author's style is remarkable as well, very flowery for the genre. I often found it over-the-top and distracting when it comes to banal descriptions but it suited very well the numerous irruptions of the unreal in the story.

Life During Wartime is so colorful and intense that other books seem dull in comparison.

For those wanting to wet their toes, the beginning of Life During Wartime is a self-sufficient short story.

If you feel like continuing, the following chapters are rather weak in my opinion but the second half of the book is worth the set up.

As to the subject matter, I'll drop a few light SPOILERS.

It's first and foremost a surreal Gringo war story. But it's also thematically similar to A Scanner Darkly, except that it's a superhero-ish fantasy (complete with happy-ish ending) and that's its philosophically upbeat in the way that surreal authors are wont to be.

You all know about Gringos and war but for those who don't know A Scanner Darkly, it's a bit soapy and it's got drugs and manipulation in spades. The fates of many characters are depressing. Also, drugs.

Precognition is important in this story with all that it implies (non-linear plot, visions, existential angst and so on).

Another remarkable thing is the way in which fantastical elements overlap with irrationality caused by crazy but mundane circumstances.

In the beginning, I didn't realize I was reading fantasy.

Marie says

One of the most intense and gratifying books I've ever read.

Tt says

This is what sci-fi should be all about. Sinister hints, shadowy wars, occultism.. pure sense of wonder.

Shepard is a genius.

DoctorM says

Suppose Joan Didion and Robert Stone did bad acid with Wm. Gibson and stumbled into a German Expressionist stage production of "Apocalypse Now"... That would be...*close* to "Life During Wartime". No one remembers Central America these days, since war in the new century is all about deserts and mountains and cities amongst the Paynim, but...this is a novel that remains darkly powerful and engrossing.

Ross Lockhart says

While Lucius Shepard's 1987 chronicle of near-future Central-American jungle warfare wears openly a uniform of post-Vietnam-era disappointment and is decorated with the emblems of Cold War paranoia, it hasn't aged badly. Shepard's prose is hallucinogenically vivid, his plotting Borgesian, his ideas, larger than life. Protagonist David Mingolla's odyssey, from hesitant trooper to lethal psy-ops assassin, is darkly picaresque, if at times episodic. From time to time, Shepard's asides (always-helmeted helicopter pilots, the Lost Patrol, a downed chopper that claims to be god) threaten to steal the show, and it is to his credit that he manages to reign in the story. Audacious, and occasionally even indulgent, LIFE DURING WARTIME is an SF war story ranking with the best of Haldeman, Hasford, or O'Brien.

Adam says

Tacking this weird moody and occasionally brilliant novel onto what is arguably his greatest work, the novella "R&R", may have earned Shepard the ire of some people. Taking a pitch perfect work and then connecting it to this somewhat messy work is risk, thankfully it occasionally pays off. A picaresque journey through the surreal brambles of his imagination and anger that is more a collection of stories and incidents than a novel, tied together with character, setting, and opaque over-all plot. Lacking some the control he exhibits in his short work but featuring some great writing and imagination. Psychic war, drug fueled madness, enough lunatics to fill a nuthouse, a surreal vision of war, dueling families are among this book's many elements. The Hollywood sell is a really stoned Dog Soldier's era Robert Stone rewriting Angela Carter's *Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman* as a cyberpunk novel. Confusing penultimate action involving a storytelling robot and zombie army is resolved by dreamlike ending. People with no love for dream logic may give this one a pass.

mark monday says

look inside, young soldier. look inside your fellow soldier, see the nothing there, see the nothing that has been put there as a reason why, see the nothing that has become a something, a reason for being a reason for acting a reason for dying. look inside your own self, young soldier. see the slowly building anger, see the red. you can shape that anger, turn it into a weapon, make it a place you can live, make it a reason for

moving forward. it is the heart of you.

Soldier of America! shine bright, and bring the radiant dawn of corporate-military interests to these little third world countries! neither you nor your masters really understand why you are there in the first place - but who cares? you are all serving greater interests! be the pawn in a long-game whose rules are long-forgotten!

out of the darkness, into more darkness; out of the jungle, into another. make a home there! America is just a memory now, a place you once were; you are much more at home in this personal heart of darkness, this jungle of the mind, this bubbling sludgy swamp of the soul. you make new friends in this new place. your friends will guide you - and you will guide them! there is so much to teach and so much to learn.

grow up and become a living weapon, little soldier. do your parents proud! destroy! burn the people, burn the land. take everything from them. who is "them" anyway? it gets so confusing in the thick of battle. everyone looks the same yet also different. and what is a "battle" anyway, when both sides share the same goal? the answer to that question: destroy both sides!

The narrative unwinds like a glistening, multi-colored snake, its coils taking the reader here and there, a sinuous adventure that moves from set-piece to set-piece, each part so differently hued from the prior part, all parts leading to one place: the head of the snake.

The prose astounds. Lucius Shepard was a genius. The images are so rich and so beautifully rendered, a wonderful horrible nightmare, so many images.

An attack of butterflies, swarming, covering every inch of them.

A downed helicopter, stuck in the trees. A computer voice that lives on, imagining itself to be God.

Shirtless pilots sunning themselves, black helmets never removed, helmets that allow them to see things far and near, into a person and into the future.

An Ant Hill full of little soldiers. An attack in the mist.

An entertainment for the masses: soldier versus panther. Alas, poor panther! It has no chance.

Gangs of children, victims and victimizers, playing by their own rules, creating their own rituals.

A barrio full of almost-zombies to be used as their masters see fit, living puppets hacking at each other when the need arises and slumping into pools of refuse and excrement while on standby.

A slaughter in a church. A much-needed slaughter. A holy slaughter!

Psychic powers: psychic puppet masters making the whole world their battleground, psychic soldiers and psychic revolutionaries... our psychic heroes, David and Debora:

you have a trait: Anger. she has a trait: Commitment.

together you will inspire each other, feed off of each other, make each other stronger with each bout of lovemaking. your Anger and her Commitment will recharge and refuel - those traits are at the heart of both of you. recognize these traits, their power, and so be made whole. they will move you forward and they will give you love, passion, a way to connect with each other and a way to understand your own selves. and they will provide you with a mission: destroy the puppet masters, one by one.

kill 'em all!

out of the jungle, into your own jungle. this Green Hell is but one room in this labyrinthine mansion; go through one door and another one will open. it is your memory palace; it is the whole wide world. follow this green path right back to your home. there you will kill and there you will forget. maybe?
