

Affair and Honor: Based on the True Story of JFK in World War II

Batt Humphreys

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The early life and WWII adventures of Jack Kennedy entertain in this powerful narrative.

In *Affair and Honor*, Batt Humphreys sketches historical fiction by delving into the life of Navy ensign John F. Kennedy as he ships out from desk duty to captain PT-109 in the South Pacific, all while the future president is entranced by a woman who may be a Nazi spy.

It's 1942. Kennedy is on duty in South Carolina, but he's not out of reach of his ambitious father's manipulations or the machinations of FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover. Sam Marlowe, *New York Herald Tribune* reporter, is on his trail too. Marlowe wants Jack's side of a story—why Kennedy's romancing a twice-married Danish woman, Inga Arvad, who once moved in high-level Nazi circles. Kennedy Sr. knows the affair could damage family political ambitions. Hoover needs dirt because illicit sex is “a tool to manage people.” Marlowe joins Kennedy's posh circle after meeting Ashley Chambliss, rich girl turned nightclub singer. The action travels next to Rhode Island after Kennedy requests PT boat assignment, Marlowe following, then to the South Seas, back to the United States, and finally to Europe. War action scenes are minimal, but decently described, while the narrative blends threads of love and war, politics and ambition.

Humphreys's fictional take offers speculative nuances to a life later lived in the public eye by an ambitious and brave young Kennedy, a man frustrated by his father's isolationism. As Kennedy's life is expanded through fiction, Marlowe's chapters are a mash-up of first person voice, detective Sam Spade, and war correspondent Ernie Pyle. In fact, Humphreys rewrites Pyle's most famous essay into an early, powerful narrative scene. The author switches to third person omniscient for other chapters, the noticeable change not ruining the flow. The dialogue's repartee is right out of the Cary Grant–Katharine Hepburn catalog of the 1930s and '40s. It works, as do descriptions of prewar South Carolina; the mud, muck, and mire of the Solomon Islands; and cloud-covered airfields of England.

The chronological narrative moves easily from scene to scene with only minor editing mistakes. The history is accurate, but there are errors involving military rank, an Air Force reference at a time when the service was the Army Air Corps, and drinkers offering a toast “to the Queen” when the king of England was George VI. Humphreys smartly offers color to the narrative by bringing in celebrities like Bob Hope and Charlie Chaplin as well as names in history's shadows like Joseph Kennedy Jr., killed in European action, and Kathleen Kennedy, who married an English lord only to die tragically in 1948.

By delving into Jack Kennedy's relatively unknown early life, Humphreys has a solid basis for historical fiction and has penned a novel that entertains without stretching the boundaries of believability.

GARY PRESLEY (June 25, 2015)

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