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Clarion Review ★★★★½ GENERAL FICTION

All Parts Together

Tom Mach
Hill Song Press (February 2006)
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The Civil War novel *All Parts Together* begins literally with a bang as the author depicts the Quantrill raid. On August 21 1863 Confederate guerillas stormed the pro-emancipation stronghold of Lawrence Kansas. They killed over 200 men and boys burning and looting the town in one of the worst atrocities of the Civil War.

All Parts Together the second in Mach's Jessica Radford trilogy brings back many players — Union loyalists Confederates African-Americans (enslaved and free) whites and Native Americans even Abraham Lincoln — for more busy adventures. Starting after the Quantrill raid the story visits major battles in the South the heated politics in Washington D.C. and finally the assassination of Lincoln on April 14 1865. Meanwhile protagonist Jessica struggles with moral dilemmas; caught between the upright married Otto Heller and the loving pro-slavery minister Matt Lightfoot; she must also determine how to make her proto-feminist abolitionist writings heard in a hostile environment.

A resident of Lawrence Kansas Mach is a self-taught historian and author whose first novel *Sissy!* won the J. Donald Coffin Memorial Book Award. *All Parts Together* brims with the same heavily researched detail as *Sissy!* Mach's deft handling of historical figures shows in his portrayal of Walt Whitman whom Jessica meets in a Washington D.C. infirmary. Whitman explains: "'My first disheartening experience occurred at the Lacy House a makeshift hospital where I saw nothing but a heap of feet legs arms and human fragments: bloody disease-ridden swelled and sickening. It was then that I resolved to make as many visits as possible to these men who were not only wounded but sick at heart and lonely. I wanted them to know that they have not been forgotten.'"

Whether historical or imaginary all of Mach's characters talk in descriptive but believable language. Mach avoids anachronisms using idioms appropriate for his characters' class and ethnicity. His sympathetic portrayal of all characters no matter what side they're on helps the reader understand the period's conflicts.

An ensemble cast can be difficult but Mach easily individualizes each character. Though the relations between Jessica her suitors and friends are confusingly complicated each well-written personality stands out. Furthermore while Mach does jump between several settings he uses strong historically recognizable storylines to ground and distinguish the plot lines like the one in which former slave Tinker and other Union soldiers evict supposed guerilla supporters after the Quantrill raid.

All Parts Together's only challenge lies in its hybrid construction. Mach tries to fuse many elements in his novel leaving the intended readership somewhat uncertain. While realistic in its historical accuracy the novel also contains currents of a purely romantic love story. The style is clear enough for middle-grade readers but the frank treatment of racism gore and sexual assault are better suited to older teens and adults. This mixed-genre book should interest not just history buffs or lovers of strong female characters but also mature readers who enjoy books that both teach and entertain.

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Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to

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