

Fit for Duty

K. A. Kron

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The unflinching thriller Fit for Duty reveals the brutalities and barbarities of war via a career military psychiatrist who faces new scrutiny.

In K. A. Kron's thriller *Fit for Duty*, an army psychiatrist's decision to send a traumatized soldier back into battle exposes her personal life and causes her to re-evaluate her adherence to military protocols.

Jennifer, a colonel, was married to an army man; her wife is also in the army, and her daughter has expressed interest in enlisting as well. Jennifer herself is a psychiatrist who, despite the army's preference that psychiatrists confine their work with shell-shocked and injured troops to army hospitals, insists on dealing with battle trauma at its source: on the front lines in Iraq. This preference resulted in the loss of one of her legs. But her injury did not diminish her belief that the point of origin is the best place to address the mental issues concomitant with battle, deal with them through therapy and medications, and send soldiers back into combat.

Jennifer's faith is rocked, however, after a mission that resulted in the deaths of children pushes her treated-and-released ex-husband to commit suicide in front of her. An investigation into her culpability for his death and a subsequent court martial threaten her both professionally and personally, exposing her daughter and her wife to scrutiny. Throughout, Jennifer remains a reliable, perspicacious narrator whose questioning of her actions, inactions, and devotion to the military are human and relatable.

The story tackles a number of discomfiting military issues: the killing of children, the recruitment of children as killers, the use of dogs in combat, the idea of what it means to be "fit for duty," and blind loyalty to an oath that endangers lives and spirits. The prose is blunt about describing nightmarish acts of war and their bloody aftermath. Amputations, prosthetics, madness, and violent outbursts are treated in a relentless, stark manner.

But some horrific scenarios repeat without need, and some points are hammered at, while gaps in the narrative slow its progression. For example, though the court martial judge dismisses one of the accusations brought against Jennifer due to a lack of sufficient evidence, the same accusation comes up in her trial. Still, the story evinces admiration for those who choose to risk their lives for their countries, and its revelations about the inner workings of government war machines and about the personnel who keep the military working are startling and valuable.

The unflinching thriller *Fit for Duty* reveals the brutalities and barbarities of war via a career military psychiatrist who faces new scrutiny.

RANDI HACKER (July 13, 2022)

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