

Clarion Review ★★★★☆

HISTORICAL

In Search of Tom Candy

Dairl M. Johnson

Dairl M. Johnson (Sep 10, 2015)

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This outstanding historical novel follows one man's quest to clear his father's name after Lincoln's assassination.

Dairl M. Johnson presents an outstanding historical novel that traces how journalist John Stanton—the fictional son of Edwin Stanton, Secretary of War under Lincoln—vindicates his father, who is rumored to have played a role in the president's assassination. *In Search of Tom Candy* explores a son's devotion in a winding mystery that spans half a century.

Armed with the belief that Tom Candy, a British cattle driver, could clear his father's name, John sets out on a westward journey to track down the elusive man. John's search in 1904 alternates with scenes of Edwin's work during the Civil War. The elder Stanton provides background for John's single-minded questions as well as dramatic intervals. Other chapters feature Tom's adventures driving a herd of longhorns from Texas to New York in the 1850s.

The thoughtful structure shuttles back and forth, building toward John's inevitable encounter with Tom—all while creating a thorough portrait of determination. Whether they pursue justice, expose corruption, or face harsh circumstances, the three main characters emerge as multifaceted men rather than simple, heroic figures.

When John finally meets Tom, the plot is quickly defused. A revelation that could be read as a clever misdirection arrives late, and does not seem fully realized. Dramatic elements—including a political conspiracy—hold potential for more expansive treatment, but are tied with neat explanations. Still, *In Search of Tom Candy* remains fascinating, bridging the decades with clearly defined episodes that intersect in surprising ways.

Other noteworthy features include a talent for enlivening the hardscrabble frontier; an eye for iconic scenes of the West, including a ghost town and buffalo stampede; and especially strong early chapters that feature Tom's arrival in America. The immigrant-turned-entrepreneur is cast as an intelligent man who keeps his cards close, and who outshines the other characters. With his larger-than-life reputation that belies a steadier nature, Tom is a complex source of insight. Scenes that feature President Lincoln offer a glimpse at the famously reserved, beloved figure, though without the same intensity. The chapter depicting Tom's successful return to New York with his herd is also memorable for its panoramic, cinematic quality.

In Search of Tom Candy raises valuable questions of ambition and laying memories to rest. Here, cities, battlefields, and trails become richly painted sites for testing personal convictions. In a tale of seeking truth, these characters imprint themselves in the imagination.

KAREN RIGBY (September 9, 2015)

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