ForeWord Reviews

BIOGRAPHY

Jacko, His Rise and Fall: The Social and Sexual History of Michael Jackson
Darwin PORTER
Blood Moon Productions
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Although Michael Jackson has stayed out the public eye for the past few months, his tale is well known to legions of celebrity gossip mongers: a talented young kid who got off track, destroyed his face through too much plastic surgery, and fled the country in the wake of accusations of pedophilia.

But there is much more to Jackson's story, some of it bizarre and nearly unbelievable—such as his odd behavior around children—and some of it rather charming. And in *Jacko*, it's all included.

Researched over several decades, *Jacko* attempts to unveil the intricacies of Jackson's character, by detailing not just his personal history, but also his friendships, the context of the times in which his star rose, and the confusion and pain that led to his recent legal troubles over inviting young boys into his bed.

Author Darwin Porter is certainly no stranger to celebrity nuances; he's penned four other unauthorized biographies of controversial figures Howard Hughes, Marlon Brando, Katherine Hepburn, and Humphrey Bogart.

One of the writer's great strengths is not in uncovering lurid details, but in telling small stories within a larger tale. For example, he interviews a former employee of the Sahara casino, who gives a personal account of the only meeting between Elvis and Jackson:

"At one point during their encounter, Elvis reached for Michael's hand. 'I owe a debt to all you black boys and your music. Without the music of "the brothers" I heard back in the Forties, there would be no Elvis Presley today.'"

When Elvis drops into a dark mood and adds that he's kidding no one, because there's no Elvis left, Michael says in a soft voice, "To me, you'll always be the greatest."

That kind of tenderness is laced throughout the biography, and often Jackson is a heartbreaking figure. He's not perfect, and definitely not without sin, but his childlike qualities have an aura of tragedy that put his recent trouble in context.

If there's a misstep in *Jacko*, it's not the writing or the subject matter, but the length of

the tome. Certainly, readers who crave every nuance of Jackson's life will delight in the minutiae uncovered by Porter, who seems to find every detail worthy of inclusion in the story.

True, it is the details of our lives that make us who we are sometimes—Bill Clinton's fondness for fried pork products, Adolf Hitler's ability to draw only landscapes rather than people, and Angelina Jolie's perpetual use of drugstore-bought Blistex for her famous lips—but with a staggering 600 pages, Porter has penned a volume more geared toward fans than the casual, curious reader.

But, in many ways, this is a minor quibble, since it's difficult to penalize a writer for erring on the side of more complexity and research rather than less. *Jacko* is, above all, a detailed portrait of a man whose enormous talents couldn't save him from abuse, ridicule, and scorn, but who also garnered worldwide acclaim at a level reached by only a very select few. In this compelling glimpse at Jackson's life, Porter manages to provide the one thing that many journalists have failed to produce in their writings about the pop star: a real person behind the headlines.

Elizabeth Millard