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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ HISTORICAL

Renaldo

James McCreath
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Set amidst the political unrest that colors so much of Argentina's history, *Renaldo* is the epic tale of the De Seta family. Renaldo De Seta is the younger of two sons in this powerful and wealthy family. When Renaldo is seven, his father Peter is killed while visiting England for a soccer tournament. This tragedy shapes the family and is largely responsible for determining what both Renaldo and his older brother Lonnie will become.

The death of his father fills Lonnie with rage, and he struggles for years to manage it. When Celeste Lavelle enters Lonnie's life as a college instructor, she manipulates Lonnie into falling in love with her and joining her as a member of a terrorist organization. Renaldo chooses a very different path. He devotes himself to playing the acoustic guitar and soccer—two of his father's favorite pastimes. In 1977 he attends the championship game of the Argentine Soccer League and when violence breaks out between fans on opposing sides, he is instrumental in saving the life of Astro Gordero, a ruthless but influential Argentinean lawyer. Gordero sees potential in Renaldo and hopes to turn the young man's talents into profit. He gives Renaldo an opportunity to try out for the Argentinean 1978 World Cup Soccer team, and sets himself up as his manager.

The author has accomplished a great deal with this book. Beginning with Renaldo's grandfather Lonfranco Guissepe De Seta, who immigrated to Buenos Aires in 1898 from Italy, the author paints a vivid picture of the era through the experiences of the De Seta family, sharing information about the culture, economics, and politics of this country. The author also introduces readers to the game of fútbol, which he generally refers to as soccer. This sport is clearly one that the author is passionate about; he captures a great deal of excitement in his description of the games. For example, about the beginning of the World Cup finale, he writes:

> *By two fifty-eight p.m., the team photographs had been taken, the combatants had exchanged informal handshakes and hollow good wishes with one another, and the teams had saluted the multitudes with upraised arms. Now, finally, Italian referee Giovanni Patrizio stood over the ball at center field. Four years of preparations, qualifying matches, exhibition contests, scandals, name calling, and bitter rivalries had all led to this one moment.*

Ultimately, this story is about hope. Peter De Seta's father came to Argentina with nothing but hope that he could make a better life for himself. He instilled the same sense of optimism in his son. After Peter's death, his two sons choose very different paths: One chooses despair, and the other chooses hope. The actions that stem from these choices will leave readers contemplating the power of this quiet feeling.
CATHERINE THURESON (July 15, 2010)

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