Clarion Review

Juvenile Fiction

Sandlot Summit
Rick Fishman
Doug Hoch, illustrator
Outskirts Press
978-1-4327-1868-8
Three Stars (out of Five)

You expect me to save the free world all by myself?

The President rose slowly and leaned toward Felix. "Indeed I do" he replied with conviction.

The year is 1984. When the President of the United States needs to avoid war with the Soviet Union he calls in…Felix Farley baseball coach?

Readers will be just as surprised as the book's unlikely hero when he gets the news. It is eventually revealed that the selection of Farley the rather clumsy but good-natured baseball coach is due to a technical error. But no one knows this when the action is set in motion so Farley and his team get their chance to shine—and save the world.

Author Rick Fishman is an accountant and youth baseball coach. He has also spent some time teaching high school math. Having Russian grandparents helped him when it came to including details about that nation.

This is a cheerful book with the kind of premise that kids will enjoy—ordinary heroes saving the world. The sometimes ironic black and white illustrations are a solid addition to the story. The book contains a glossary of words that might be difficult for its target audience (middle grade students). A bit more context about the political climate of the 1980s would also have been helpful; many middle school students of today know little of the Cold War or the former Soviet Union. Still it will offer teachable moments for those kids who read it and inquire about these topics.

The book's themes of national honor and baseball are two topics that have been tarnished in recent times and the book clearly values both. Before telling his team about their important mission Coach Felix wants to give the occasion the pomp and circumstance it

deserves. He asks the bat girl to play the “Star Spangled Banner” on the flutaphone. She doesn’t know it. He goes on the list other songs including “You’re a Grand Old Flag.” They finally settle on “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” which she learned at school.

On the amusement front the book offers a story akin to *The Bad News Bear*s and similar movies in which a rag tag team of players bands together for a common cause. In the movies equal time is given to the players and the adult coach because movies are watched by people of all ages. However in books for children the protagonist really should be a child to hold young readers’ attention.