Clarion Review

Historical

The Cost of Courage
Joseph Cordaro
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Three Stars (out of Five)

With U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and the crises in the Middle East, Joseph Cordaro's debut novel, *The Cost of Courage*, is an apposite portrait of the ethical ambiguity war places on one's humanity. The Courtland family faced hardships like many British families whose husbands returned from the Great War, only to have sons enter World War II.

The story begins when Lieutenant Commander Charles Courtland comes home from the Battle of Jutland wounded physically and mentally. He recovers from his bodily injuries, but his horrifying warfare experiences are so psychologically damaging and damning that his psychic wounds become festering lesions that manifest as nightmares and dark moods. His condition affects his marriage and family, especially his son Brent. The author, a retired professional aviator who served in the Navy, writes, "Deeper into the blackness he descended while his thoughts punished him with the images of battle, so vivid… He was forced to relive the sight of flames, smoke, and carnage."

As Brent grows into adulthood, his relationship with his father becomes estranged. After a few incidents of adolescent rebelliousness and a trip to America where he meets the Wades, his surrogate family, Brent learns the truth about his father's experience at the Battle of Jutland and the reason for their poor relationship. Brent becomes a submarine captain of great reputation and is enlisted by Winston Churchill to carry out a secret mission of vital importance to Britain's role in World War II, but the act is so morally reprehensible to Brent's code of ethics that, like his father, he slips into a cold, dark despair and pushes away his own wife and sons. Cordaro writes that Brent "had to suppress an urge to scream and have his voice drown out the voices in his head, the cries of the dying Americans."

The Cost of Courage is a quick read composed of short, emotion-filled chapters. Cordaro's powerful writing leaves readers out of breath and dehydrated from sweat and tears.

His characters' senses of honor, duty, morality, and family feels so real that the reader bonds with them and feels everything they feel, like a saltwater spray on the face or the incensed throb of betrayal. A period piece and historical fiction, the story provides plenty for World War I and World War II aficionados. Not just a novel to entertain, readers will also learn the cost of courage.

Lee Gooden