



The Heart of War: Misadventures in the Pentagon

Kathleen J. McInnis

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The Heart of War by national policy veteran Kathleen McInnis is part office drama, part foible-filled romp through the US's military bureaucracy.

When Dr. Heather Reilly arrives at the Pentagon to work as an academic fellow, she already has misgivings. Along with her vegan, pacifist fiancé Ryan, she's always seen herself as someone working toward peace, not preparing the country for war. However, from the moment she walks through the Pentagon's doors, nothing goes as she expects. Sometimes, the work feels worth it (she's there in part to honor the memory of her brother Jon, who died in combat), but at other times, it is simply bewildering.

Reilly and her colleagues work across government departments to secure approvals for a major military deployment. It could stabilize relations with Russia—or, as many warn, it could “cause World War III.” Along the way, Reilly develops confidence, pushes against needless bureaucracy, and sees how her voice can be impactful in policy.

Through the high stakes of Pentagon work, Reilly's close colleague Voight provides endearing levity. He encourages her to “embrace the suck” when things go wrong. The tone remains irreverent throughout, providing an effective if gentle critique of the back-and-forth needed to accomplish anything in the Pentagon.

Quick dialogue between complex characters keeps the plot moving forward even as the work of the coalitions team is stymied and set back. Details about the inside of Congress and the Pentagon ring true and give the text a behind-the-scenes feel without taking away from the rollicking plot.

Reilly and her colleagues can be counted on throughout the story to be clueless and brilliant by turns, keeping the plot fun through its many twists. Emotional moments tug on the heartstrings, and the romantic subplot concludes in a very satisfying way. Kathleen McInnis's *The Heart of War* is an amusing contemporary romance.

LAURA LEAVITT (November/December 2018)

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