FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ SPORTS & RECREATION

The Man With Two Arms: A Novel

Billy Lombardo
Overlook Hardcover (Feb 4, 2010)
Unknown $24.95 (304pp)
978-1-59020-307-1

Danny Granville is the most gifted young baseball player ever to come out of Chicago. His father, Henry, an obsessive fan of the game, can take the credit-and the blame-for igniting Danny's passion. Henry took Danny to Wrigley Field to see the Cubs play when his son was four months old. He bought the boy a baseball glove for his first birthday, gave it to him five months early, and was playing catch with him two weeks later. A high school science teacher, Henry also fostered the key to Danny's excellence: his ambidexterity. Danny can hit or pitch righty or lefty, thanks in part to a "symmetry campaign" run secretly by his father to encourage the adolescent Danny to use either hand, or either foot, whenever possible. But symmetry for Danny has become a profound attribute. He is also an artist; he paints under the tutelage of an older girl who rents the apartment upstairs. Like the Vitruvian Man, da Vinci's man of ideal proportions, Danny seems to have it all-strength, coordination, self-discipline, empathy, and intuition. And this intuitiveness, at times, crosses over into foresight.

While Henry "encourages" Danny so as to prepare him for a Darwinian universe, Danny's mother Lori wants to protect the boy from the slings and arrows of competition. In their separate ways, the parents fear the downside to their son's burden/gift-that they might lose their son and each other to his greatness. Such is the narrative tension of Billy Lombardo's ambitious first novel, The Man with Two Arms. It is a Chicago story, a follow-up to Lombardo's book of Chicago stories, The Logic of a Rose (2005), which won the G.S. Sharat Chandra Prize for Short Fiction. It is also a baseball story; fans will appreciate the arc of Billy's path to stardom as told by Lombardo, a poet and MFA graduate who writes baseball like a true insider. Lombardo knows the ropes-the practice, preparation, conditioning, and game smarts, from T-ball through Single A to the Chicago Cubs-that go into making the first truly successful "switch-pitcher" in the history of the game.

The Man with Two Arms becomes more than a Chicago baseball story, more than a study of pushy parenting or high-profile superstardom. As Lombardo ratchets up the stakes, greed and betrayal threaten everything Danny has become, and the greatest of his many gifts leads him to a more crucial destiny than mere athletic fame. Lombardo reaches for the stars here, examining the possibilities and pitfalls of a unique kind of superman. (February) Joe Taylor (December 16, 2009)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author provided free copies of his/her book to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the author for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love and make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.