ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

THRILLER

The Red Wing Sings
Tom Omstead
FriesenPress
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Tom Omstead uses a terrorist detonation of a Detroit-area nuclear power plant as the premise for an American invasion of the country where the attacker came from—in this case, Canada. *The Red Wing Sings* weaves together events and themes from the last such invasion, the War of 1812, with those of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and imbues them with a renewed sense of Manifest Destiny by extremists in the United States.

Omstead presents a highly readable, reasonably plausible, and generally engaging political thriller. The story includes a rather typical cast of villainous politicians, puffed-up martinets, unlikely heroes, and conscience-stricken soldiers who eventually do the right thing rather than follow orders of dubious legality and questionable morality. While all of the bad guys are American, so are many of the good guys. This seemingly small decision not only makes the story more palatable for the Americans this Canadian author most likely hopes will read his book, but also goes a long way toward making it believable. It also mirrors the diversity and dissension in the American political psyche of both today and 1812.

The Red Wing Sings is cleanly written and there are many chapters that are interesting and exciting. There is a bit of humor in the book, and most American readers will likely smile when they realize all of the Canadians in the novel are, well, just darn nice! This increases the level of sympathy for the Canadians Omstead wants his readers to feel. While he does dip into cartoonish caricature for some of the villains and presents some of the Canadians as a bit too pleasant, polite, and noble to be realistic, the author maintains a good balance between what readers of this genre expect and the message and story he wishes to present.

Omstead enhances his method by including excerpts from the diary of Sir Issac Brock, the hero of the defense of Canada in the War of 1812. The hero of *The Red Wing Sings*, Will Anderson, draws both inspiration and battle plans from the diary of an old warrior, just as many self-taught revolutionary and resistance leaders have done throughout history. This device lends authenticity to the events Anderson sets in motion and makes the plot all the more believable.

Some chapters, notably those where the Objibways (or "Hiawathans") go on about the spirit of the earth and the time of devastation versus the time of renewal, seem thrown in for no particular reason. The story suffers because of this, often coming to a screeching halt. Omstead manages to recover the pace after each leaden interlude, but his tale would have been a bolder, stronger, and more engaging read without them. There are also some chapters, particularly in the early part of the book after the initial terrorist attack, that similarly break the pace readers of this genre expect.

The Red Wing Sings is a good read. While a story based on a power-mad extremist coming to power in America in reaction to a crisis is not new or implausible, especially as events since 9/11 have shown, it is unique in its inclusion of the theme of Manifest Destiny reborn vis-à-vis Canada. If not a classic along the lines of *Seven Days in May*, Omstead's novel is sufficiently different and well-written enough to be remembered by those who read it.

Mark G. McLaughlin