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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

The Redemption of Oppenheimer

Robert Montagnese
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The life and times of the controversial Manhattan Project leader J. Robert Oppenheimer are lightly touched upon in this novel by writer Robert Montagnese. The author weaves his web of fiction using actual people locations and events.

Sadly Montagnese's prose is crafted around these real people and places more than the events of the novel itself leading to a stagnant read that lacks emotion and adventure. It begins with the author detailing his visit to the island of St. John with his partner John. The writing takes the form of several journal entries written from Montagnese's perspective as the pair travel the island and take in the sights and sounds around them. The author doesn't divulge any profound information regarding Oppenheimer's character or even his own; instead he focuses on making the story as realistic as possible.

"After a long cocktail hour at Kokomo we called our friend Judy and asked her to meet us at 'Miss Lucy's' an out of the way restaurant in Coral Bay" the author writes. The story is filled with passages such as this one where Montagnese introduces his audience to a real location and an actual friend who lived in the area. The passage is followed by lengthy descriptions of the restaurant; Montagnese describes everything from the goats in the front yard to the broken concrete patio. The story has an incredibly genuine feel which is certainly its most appealing facet. However between all of this detail and description there is little action to keep readers involved.

The novel's lackluster dialogue is a far cry from the vivid descriptions that permeate the book and the characters are flat and one-dimensional. There is little revealed about anything of historical importance here; although it is a fictional tale one would imagine that the author would take a cue from Dan Brown and interweave fact and fiction. The premise is slightly confusing as well; Montagnese essentially tells the story from his own point of view although it is a work of fiction.

Ultimately Montagnese's prose is too stern and undeveloped especially his dialogue. There is certainly a story to tell here but the author simply doesn't tell it properly.

LIAM BRENNAN (January 22, 2009)

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