Clarion Review

Historical

The Vulture's Crucible
Peter S. Soronen
Lulu
978-1-105-63909-8
Three Stars (out of Five)

Fans of combat-based video games and action movies will find Peter Soronen's *The Vulture's Crucible* a satisfying read—one that's focused on engagements between the Nazis and the British armed forces and Dutch resistance fighters. Written more like a film script than a novel, the story begins with a blast of action that propels the plot to its conclusion. Sequences advance through dialogue and rely on the reader's familiarity with classic and contemporary films like *Run Silent, Run Deep*, *The Dirty Dozen*, and *Inglorious Bastards* rather than vivid description—except when there is an opportunity for details of erupting body parts spouting blood. Soronen includes sufficient historical detail about the desperate situation of Britain in 1940 and the role of Dutch resistance in hiding and helping prisoners of war, cloaking an otherwise improbable tale in an aura of realism.

Soronen weaves several stories into a fantastic adventure, devoting alternating chapters to various strands. The main story focuses on Allen Steinmetz, an American Jew who has become a Royal Air Force pilot. After a disfiguring crash, he is recruited by British intelligence to assume the identity of an SS colonel. Behind enemy lines, Allen becomes The Vulture, an imperfect but resourceful secret agent.

Other plot lines involve the efforts of the RAF to disrupt Nazi communication networks in Holland and the British navy's attempts to cut off the supply line for German battleships. Less developed stories of Dutch resistance, prisoners of war, and naval battles create a weakly plausible microcosm of World War II. To track all these stories, readers must switch focus as nimbly as they might flip back and forth between two television shows airing simultaneously.

Allen Steinmetz, the slightly introspective hero, is the most fully developed character in the novel, but he is no James Bond. In spite of his fluency in German, he stumbles in his efforts to cruise below the radar of the Gestapo, yet he succeeds by failing. He struggles with the

unexpected intricacies of playing a role and working with the elaborate mask that transforms his hideously burnt face into Colonel Dietz. If readers can overlook the perfect coincidence of Steinmetz's background and the implausibility of the unique putty that transforms his featureless face, they may find the character worth following in further adventures.

At times the writing is fresh. For instance, when a pilot is shot down and on fire, "hell reached up to embrace him." However, the manuscript is far from ready for general publication. Dialogue lacks quotation marks, and commas are missing or misplaced. Homophones are confused: "your" for "you're," "too" instead of "to," "it's" for "its," and so on. These errors draw attention away from the characters and action and distort sentence logic.

The manuscript's lack of polish is regrettable. Soronen's writing is good, and his story is ambitious.

Geraldine Richards