



Window Above the Porch

Kevin Costanzi

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Window Above the Porch is a novel whose consideration of war is authentic and harrowing.

Kevin Costanzi's novel *Window Above the Porch* is a realistic, action-focused war story told with a wide and empathetic perspective.

In the Green Zone of Baghdad during the height of the Iraq War, Angel, a Filipino contractor, is also a secret revolutionary guerrilla. He gets more than he bargained for on an unarmed escapade. Major Danunzio and his Crisis Reaction Force team up with Iraqi forces for a hostage rescue mission. The unit ends up in battle with the insurgents; the lives of ten hostages are at stake.

The writing is lean and propulsive, even artful. Military specifics make the work more credible, though related jargon may confuse outsiders. Because they are specific, with ringing ears and disorientation after explosions, action scenes come alive. Intense, graphic violence conveys the physical tolls of war. Chapters begin with dates and locations, adding to the verisimilitude, and the book moves in a straightforward chronology. Once its backstory in the Philippines is established, it is action packed.

The perspective shifts between characters, including various soldiers, Iraqi Army volunteers, and insurgents, heightening the tension and stakes. All are fleshed out, including Iraqi and Muslim characters who are developed as well-rounded human beings instead of generic adversaries. Without casting aspersions at Islam, the text shows how religious extremism contributed to the insurgency against the US's occupation of Iraq.

The book's unique approach to storytelling shows all sides, illuminating how the war played out from various perspectives. It delves into the psychology of various actors in the conflict, giving them credible and well-established motivations.

Idiosyncratic in its style, some of the book's scenes are overwrought, and its mixed metaphors and misused hyphens are distractions. All-caps sentences add to the drama of descriptions, as with the number of casualties after a firefight. Some images are haunting, like that of "a soldier's broken body ... a leg taken forever by an IED's avarice."

Touching upon the randomness of war and questions such as why one soldier survived a shootout and another did not, the book's themes are looming, though it avoids philosophizing and does not go deep. Media coverage of the war, and the rules of engagement, are handled in a way that seems resentful.

Gritty and grounded, the dialogue is colloquial when it needs to be but still high minded. As a major character's background comes to light, the book builds to a climax that resolves its narrative arc and is satisfying, even if the final conflict is a little too neat.

Ambitious in its multifaceted storytelling, *Window Above the Porch* is a novel whose consideration of war is authentic and harrowing.

JOSEPH S. PETE (August 9, 2019)

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