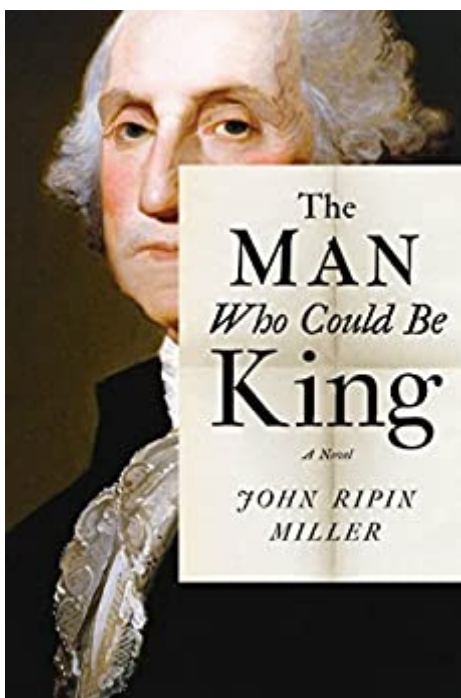


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The Man Who Could Be King: A Novel



Synopsis

When young Josiah Penn Stockbridge accepts the position as aide-de-camp to George Washington at the beginning of the Revolutionary War, he thinks only of the glory and romance of battle. He is unprepared for the reality of America's bloody fight for independence. The Continental Army is starving, underpaid, and dangerously close to mutiny, and Washington fights not just to defeat the British but to maintain order and morale among his own men. As anonymous letters by officers calling for revolt circulate through camp in Newburgh, New York, Washington must make a choice: preserve the young republic by keeping civilian control of the military, or reshape the new government by standing in solidarity with his troops and assuming greater power for himself. During one fateful week in American history, Josiah will watch a conflicted general become a legend and will discover for himself that the greatest struggles of war are those within the hearts and minds of fallible men.

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Customer Reviews

This is not your run-of-the-mill historical novel. While the story is based upon the events of the Revolutionary War, much of the action is a retelling of history through the eyes of Washington's aide, Josiah (who is a compilation of all the aides assigned to Washington during the war). Thus the book takes on more of the feel one might experience when reading Bruce Catton or Thomas Fleming. This is history in an entertaining form. Undoubtedly, there might be some who will state that the portrayal of Washington is a product of hero worship, though I would argue against that. While author John Ripen Miller does indicate the possibility that Washington might have had more of a hand in many of the decisions that have been assigned to others, he merely hints at the possibility that Washington may have influenced those decisions. If this was true of Washington, this is nothing more than what great and learned men have done throughout the centuries, allowing others to reap the glory if the decisions were instrumental in achieving the end goal. This is the mark of a strong leader. You certainly have to consider that an author who would spend enough time to ensure that his writing style and tone were consistent (which it is) would also spend at least as much time on ensuring that the story was based upon facts. While I am not an expert on Washington lore, I found much of the book to fit within the framework of what I knew about Washington, both in acts and character. The fact that Josiah is relating the story sixty years after the Revolutionary War allows the author to focus on the Newburgh Conspiracy while filling the pages with flashbacks on what occurred previous to that week. Mr. Miller has taken a moment in history and turned it into a historical novel that informs as well as entertains. At the very least, he gives us some thoughts to contemplate, and I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys history, especially when it is mixed with the flavor of a good story. Five stars.

I did not know the story that this book told. It is a very easy read. I had finished it before I realized it. Note, the actual book is only 1/2 of the book. The last half is pictures and copies of actual documents that the author used. If you enjoy reading history, this book is for you.

Readers learn as much about the narrator Josiah's life (as he wishes his persona to be seen) as about Washington's mind (insofar as his temptations and difficult choices are presented). As writing goes, Miller's narrator provides credibility to this historical fiction, both by the facts he knows and by his self-effacing approach. Some may find this book dull in its rehearsal of Washington's virtues or in the composite narrator, a criticism that says more about the critic than the writer. It is a no small literary feat to pull off historical fiction and, at the same time, create a narrator whose knowledge and writing skills are perfectly suited to the story being told. If that's easy to do, just try it!

The book has many strong points. It's very well-researched with some great information and insights into the Revolutionary era as well as General Washington. I particularly liked the author's narrative voice and style which made the book very enjoyable to read. It offers some illumination on the conspiracy at Newburgh which had the hopes of setting up a military coup. However, as a work of fiction, it leaves a bit to be desired. The book is set up with a chapter marking each day's events leading up to the momentous meeting at Newburgh where General Washington stopped a mutiny that could have destroyed the nascent Republic. These events are short and are followed by lengthy exposition on events from earlier in the Revolution. Every chapter has a backstory dump at the end. The whole thrust of the book was to focus on the author's idea that Washington struggled with the idea of leading the mutiny. Further the author posits if Washington were so tempted it would actually add to his legacy as he turned from a serious temptation. I can't help but feel that the author being a recent member of Congress may bare on this moral calculation. It feels like threading a needle. Would we have more honor for a spouse who wrestled with committing adultery or one for whom it was never a serious consideration. Would we have more respect for a Congressman who instinctively rejected a bribe or who struggled with the temptation of accepting it? Either way, all we can read are the external circumstances and despite the author's attempt to suggest otherwise, nothing in the record really raises the idea of Washington thinking about leading the mutiny above the level of pure speculation. At any rate, it's still an interesting book.

In school we heard about what George Washington did. Every year US History covered him and the other Founding Fathers, in more detail as our years went by. However we were never told about Newburgh and what he didn't do, which is a real shame as after reading this book I think it should be covered in school. It would give more depth to the class. I can remember sometimes my classmates and I wondered why he didn't just take over. This is a book everyone should read. I find it to be a very well done historical novel. Written from the perspective of Josiah, who is an amalgamation of the 32 aides that he had during the Revolutionary War, we go through the war with the pair. We experience the highs and the lows, the soldiers with no shoes or adequate clothing, and the shipments of spoiled meat. And yet, when the touchiest possible mutiny in the military ranks threatens the war effort General Washington does not answer the temptation to pursue a military takeover of Congress to install himself as head of the nation. He calms and turns aside the mutiny. I also really appreciated the appendices and notes after the main body of the book. The level of

research was extremely deep and I am enthralled by the supporting information.

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