

Blood and Honor Short Guide

Blood and Honor by W. E. B. Griffin

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Characters

Cletus Frade is a lieutenant in the U.S.

Marine Corps during the Second World War, but he is no ordinary shavetail; his father is a colonel in the Argentine Army and a leader in one of the country's major military-political factions. Frade's mother, a former Baltimore debutante, died long before; Frade's grandfather, in Baltimore, is dead. The novel opens with, in rapid succession, the assassination of Frade's father by Nazi agents, afraid of the father's influence with anti-Nazi factions; the declaration by Dorotea Mallin, Frade's beloved, that she is pregnant; and their subsequent marriage.

Dorotea is lovely and very young but has a will of steel. A daughter of a friend of Cletus's father (and of Cletus's grandfather), she falls in love with Cletus at first sight. Her character is not particularly well developed, but is finely drawn; she reacts with strength, but much like all of Griffin's heroes' wives or lovers, she also reacts with loyalty and resignation.

Sergeant Major Enrico Rodriguez functions as Frade's Argentine alter ego. He is wounded in the assassination of Cletus's father, and thus has a blood revenge debt to pay to Cletus and the dead Colonel Frade. First as the senior Frade's orderly, following him into retirement, and now Cletus's orderly and aide, the Sergeant Major lives in a world where there is no gray, only black and white. His loyal devotion to the Frade family (even when Cletus may not deserve it) highlights the elemental nature of loyalty—to family, patron, and friends before nation.

Peter-Hans is Frade's twin in many ways. He, too, has a non-Nazi lover—a patrician Argentine woman, Alicia Carzino-Cormano. He despises the Nazis for their horrid ideology and their lowclass motives (e.g., the plan to extort ransom money from Auschwitz detainees and to use those funds to establish a Nazi colony in Argentina). His father, who is from a noble family (a military family in Pomerania that has produced five generals for German armies), is a spur to his understanding of his family's honor. His dilemmas of loyalty are much like Cletus's. However, he knows that failure in his own mission to bring his own family's money to Argentina to provide for them after the war will mean the death of his entire family as well as himself; the stakes are much higher for him than for Cletus.

Standartenfuhrer Josef Goltz is one of those responsible for Colonel Frade's death; he is also Hans-Peter's superior officer in neutral Argentina as part of the Jewish ransom money extortion plan. He is drawn as a glib, autocratic character whose surface personality is cold, overlying an even more cold internal set of values (or lack thereof, for he is totally amoral). His death at the hands of Sergeant Major Rodriguez provides closure to more than one plot line, and provides a fitting cap to the end of the book; honor, long delayed for Cletus, Rodriguez, and Von Wachtstein—is fully or partially fulfilled with Goltz's death.

Social Concerns

The issues of World War II are evident in *Blood and Honor*; indeed, it does not attempt to bridge time to make a 1990s point, but immerses itself in a 1940s and World War II ethos and mind set. The complex of morality issues surrounding the very existence of Nazism is evident from the beginning of the novel, with the revelation of a Nazi scheme to ransom Jews from Auschwitz and then to use that money to establish a safe haven for Nazis in Argentina after the war. The amorality of this scheme is not shown through demonizing the characters completely, as might be done elsewhere, but by presenting them as semi-corporate functionaries.

These functionaries are also responsible for the death of Cletus Frade's Argentinean father, a retired colonel in the Argentinean army who was suspected (rightly) of being pro-Allied in his sympathy. This death leads Cletus to examine his own loyalties to his Argentinean family and its many connections, especially the estancia (family estate) and its many retainers, all of whom are quite new and often confusing to Cletus.

The semi-feudalism of the Argentinean culture Griffin creates is evident in many ways throughout the book—from the way Cletus is treated by family retainers (most especially retired Sergeant Major Rodriguez) to the elaborate web of reactions, concealment, and rapid arrangements when he marries his newly-pregnant fiancée, Dorotea. In many ways Cletus's very new culture is confusing; the novel gives the reader the chance to see how, and if, Cletus grows into it.

Techniques

As with his other books, Griffin's narrative style carries this story swiftly.

Foremost is his eye for detail. While there is some bloodshed and conflict, the bloodshed (that is, that we see, rather than that we learn about) is largely limited; most noteworthy are a book-ended murder at the beginning and its retributive revenge at the end. Griffin brings the reader in with his realm of otherwise-trivial detail and spreads them thickly through the book; there are few scenes that are straight narrative. Griffin seldom leaves the reader with an unfinished scene or incomplete character; rather, the minutia of the dialogue and the seemingly offhand details complete the tableauxlike scenes. For example, we learn all about Suboficial Mayor (Sergeant Major) Rodriguez through the description of his bearing and the oft-repeated "a sus ordenes" (as you order). The description of the uniform of the Husares Pueyrredon (an Argentine regiment), of clothing (for which Griffin has a particularly adept eye), and of interiors bring reality where a stock battle scene might not.

Themes

The themes of this book are embodied in its title, which represents both the bloodshed of war and also the strong ties of blood, or family loyalty. Cletus Frade, the protagonist, finds that he can neither rescind his Argentine roots nor dismiss his American upbringing. Honor is embodied in this context; often, blood ties generate the responsibility of defending the honor of one's family. Loyalty—to family, to nation, to extended community, to political faction, to friends—is the major manifestation of the characters (particularly Cletus's) concern with blood and honor. Cletus and Peter-Hans both find themselves caught in a dilemma—if Peter-Hans is too overt in his loyalty to his father, a German general, his father and family will surely be killed by the Gestapo. If he furthers the plans of his SS overseer, however, he will be neglecting the loyalty he bears to his Pomeranian family. In addition, he bears the additional responsibility for carrying out a family mission not unlike the Nazi's plan—ferrying out family money from Germany to Argentina so that the family will not be destitute when the war is over.

Here, though, Peter's first loyalty is to his family (and next to his friend Cletus).

Cletus is in a similar predicament, for he must deal with the nascent OSS, the FBI, an Argentine coup d'etat and Argentine political loyalties, the U.S. Army, his own American sympathies, and his growing Argentine sentiments. The interservice rivalries he feels heighten the pressures placed upon him.

Adaptations

No film or television adaptations have been made of Griffin's military books, but many have been made into audiobook format: *Blood and Honor* was produced in 1996 by Bantam Berkeley Audio in an abridged edition.

Key Questions

As many young people approach the age of Cletus Frade, they must, like Cletus, confront serious issues such as loyalty to family, friends, school, and jobs. If we look at Cletus by himself, we see a conflicted young man—deprived of his family and his newly found father, burdened with a pregnant fiancée, threatened by people trying to kill him, and betrayed by his newest friend who is his nation's enemy. How Cletus handles all these pressures and remains true to himself—if indeed he does—opens many attitudes about personal and social responsibility.

The issue of friendship is brought out with Cletus's relationship to Peter-Hans, with whom he should by rights not be friends; groups could also discuss the way that the friendship is formed, on what it is based, and what the nature of this friendship is. Likewise, readers could examine the relationship between Cletus and Dorotea, and its relative reality based on their own experiences.

1. Examine the character of Cletus. Is he a flat or full character? What techniques does the author use to describe him?
2. Why do Cletus and Peter-Hans, although wartime enemies, have such a fast friendship? What does this say about these persons? What does it say about the nature of friendship?
3. How does loyalty to one's blood family develop through the course of the book, especially in the context of Cletus and Peter-Hans, and what are the various definitions of honor that they are upholding?
4. Cletus and Dorotea fall in love in an earlier novel in this series; in this book, Dorotea becomes pregnant, and they marry soon after this is revealed. How does Cletus deal with these developing events? Does he do the honorable thing, given his unique circumstances? How does this affect your perception of his and Dorotea's characters? How do you reconcile this with the reactions of Cletus's family at the end of the novel?
5. Sergeant Major Rodriguez is a unique character; he seems to exist only to serve Cletus's father, and later Cletus. Is this an honorable position for him? Is he an unthinking automaton, or does he reveal any other wisdom or character development later in the novel?
6. How is *Blood and Honor* like or unlike other military-based fiction you may have read? Are the characters more or less real? What do you think causes this?
7. What are the competing loyalties faced by Peter-Hans? Which ones do you think he is most loyal to, and why? Is he a typical Nazi, or is he more like Cletus?

Why?



8. Characterize Dorotea. Is she an independent person, or is she more dependent on Cletus? What scenes in the novel particularly show this? Where do her loyalties lie?

Robert Whipple, Jr.

Literary Precedents

James Jones's *From Here to Eternity* (1951; see separate entry) may be similar to Griffin's work in its attention to the detail beyond the battles; as do Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny* (1951; see separate entry) and Richard McKenna's *The Sand Pebbles* (1962). C. S. Forester's military novels (among them *The Gun*, 1933; *The General*, 1936; *The Good Shepherd*, 1955; and the *Horatio Hornblower* novels, 1945-1952), also provide copious background detail (usually on British politics, the nobility, and means of advancement) to provide their own unique flavor, but have considerably more battle scenes, as do Patrick O'Brien's *Aubrey/Maturin* novels, as well as the novels of Douglas Reeman (who also uses the pen name Alexander Kent), and the cavalry and aviation novels of Max Hennessey. Tom Clancy's *Hunt for Red October* (1984; see separate entry), *Red Storm Rising* (1986; see separate entry), and *Clear and Present Danger* (1989; see separate entry) use detail in similar ways; however, Clancy's details are primarily technically oriented, and not personally revelatory. Harold Coyle's *Team Yankee* (1987) is another technically detailed novel, chronicling a Soviet attack into NATO territory through Germany's Fulda Gap.

Related Titles

To an avid, or even an occasional Griffin reader, it is obvious that his 20+ military and police novels (see the biographical entry on Griffin in the main volumes of this work) are all, to a degree, related.

The Brotherhood of War and The Corps series (the latter of which Blood and Honor is a part) treat military persons and their interactions with each other, the formation of the military mind set, and the moral and social codes within which they live.

Blood and Honor and its immediate predecessor Honor Bound (1994) detail the doings of Cletus Frade.



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