

The Evening News Short Guide

The Evening News by Arthur Hailey

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Contents

The Evening News Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Characters.....	3
Social Concerns/Themes.....	4
Techniques.....	5
Key Questions.....	6
Literary Precedents.....	7
Copyright Information.....	8



Characters

The Evening News has two casts of characters, the group that works for CBA and the group involved in the kidnapping. The news people stand for the forces of goodness. Putting aside all their personal and professional differences during the crisis that strikes Sloane and involves their company, they devote their efforts to tracking down the terrorists and releasing the hostages. As each one enters into action, the author provides a capsule biography describing their special talents and personal traits which never change during the story. Thus, executive producer Chuck Insen is consistently determined to impose his conception of the type of news to feature each evening while senior field producer Rita Abrams is always forthright and self-assured and cameraman Minh Van Canh can work calmly and efficiently in the most dangerous or complicated situations. Crawford Sloane always displays dignity and integrity and even in the midst of his great crisis never neglects his responsibilities as a newscaster. Harry Partridge, the journalist and war correspondent who heads the rescue mission into the Peruvian jungle, instead is a modern knight ready to do combat and to maintain order and eager to save Jessica, the woman he once loved and lost to Sloane.

Of the terrorists, the leader Ulises Rodriguez, known as Miguel, is the most villainous: a man without moral principles, a cold-blooded killer able to follow orders without question, and an accomplished criminal who can remain calm in any circumstances. Never once during the whole operation does he make a false move or betray any human compassion for the sufferings of the prisoners. Indeed, all the complications and the final failure are caused by his collaborators. These include Julio and Socorro, two Colombian citizens affiliated to the drug cartels; an alcoholic American doctor barred from practicing in the United States; and the Peruvian guards at the makeshift prison.

The hostages, Jessica Sloane, her son Nicholas, and her elderly father-in-law Angus Sloane, undergo their terrible ordeal with courage and dignity. Although Jessica cannot prevent the brutality which harms Nicholas and eventually kills Angus, she teaches them how to endure their imprisonment without losing their self-respect, and she keeps them from giving in to the temptation to feel trustful of the more humane of the guards. Throughout the ordeal, she waits for the opportunity to use the skills she learned in a course in "close quarters battle," a form of unarmed combat in which even a small person can disarm and kill an attacker.

When Partridge finally arrives, her CQB skills allow her and Nicholas to escape into the jungle where Partridge's rescue party is ready to lead them towards safety.

Social Concerns/Themes

As in his previous novels, information, suspense, and melodrama are the main components of the story Hailey tells in *The Evening News*. The modern institution examined in this work is network television news, namely, the world of CBA-TV News in New York City. On the day the story begins, CBA rushes to cover live an airplane crash in time for the first edition of the evening broadcasts. The crash forces the various teams to function at their maximum efficiency.

While dramatizing how they cope with this emergency, Hailey provides an overview of the technical tasks, editorial decisions and practical problems involved in putting together a primetime daily news program. Here, and later on in the book, he identifies the nature of the hierarchy in this institution, describes the qualities the best professionals in the field need to possess and comments on how the nature of their work forces them to repress their emotional responses, a tendency which they sometimes unfortunately carry over into their private lives. He also exposes the constant power struggles within CBA over who is going to occupy the key positions, especially, who is going to act as anchorman and thus determine the particular character of the broadcasts.

Unlike other novels by Hailey, which hardly touch on big social or political issues but only treat general topical concerns like pollution and drug abuse, *The Evening News* deals with the tragedy of international terrorism. In fact, the wife, son, and father of the CBA anchorman Crawford Sloane are kidnapped by a group of terrorists associated with Sendero Luminoso, the Peruvian revolutionary guerilla movement headed by Abimael Guzman. The narrative details all the phases of the kidnapping: the elaborate preparations which include getting false passports and smuggling large sums of money; the violence of the kidnapping; life in the temporary American hideout; the dangerous escape from the country; the clandestine arrival in Peru; the exhausting trek through the jungle; the terrible conditions in the prison; negotiations with CBA for release of the hostages; their thrilling rescue. Occasionally, the omniscient narrator or one of the characters mentions the larger political context in which Sendero Luminoso developed, points out its links with organized crime in Peru and Colombia, stresses its implication in drug trafficking or reflects on the impact of terrorism on modern society. Mainly, however, the terrorist kidnapping serves to heighten tension and create suspense. As in any good thriller about kidnapping, the novel climaxes in a spectacular rescue which in this case is carried out by a group of television newscasters rather than by the police or the armed forces. In this way, Hailey avoids getting embroiled in discussing politics and reaffirms his emphasis on individual heroism.

Techniques

Of all of Hailey's novels, *The Evening News* has the tightest narrative focus and the highest level of tension because from the opening chapters to the closing pages it gives prominence to the various phases of the kidnapping and because this event touches the lives of all the characters. Even the carefully-researched information that serves to satisfy the readers' curiosity about network television news is presented in the context of the emergency created when the terrorists capture Sloane's family. In a manner typical of Hailey's fiction, the story unfolds in short episodes that often end on a note of suspense which stimulates the readers' interest. Through skillful intercutting, the narrative alternates episodes about the rescue activities of CBA-TV personnel at the home office and in the New York metropolitan area with episodes dramatizing the tactics of the terrorists at the scene of the kidnapping in New York City, in their hideout in New Jersey, and at the prison in the Peruvian jungle.



Key Questions

The issues of terrorism and nationalism remain complex international concerns. The group might discuss how the current problems have or have not changed from Hailey's depiction of them. The issue of the ethics of television journalism has become increasingly prominent, and the group might discuss some of the latest charges of sensational or zealous reporting.

1. From the descriptions Hailey provides of the newscasters at CBA, what personal and professional skills are most likely to facilitate success in the world of network television news?
2. Comment on the series of coincidences that prepared Jessica Sloane for survival as a hostage.
3. Why are war correspondents so often depicted as modern-day heroes?

To what degree does Harry Partridge fit into this category?

4. Do you find Hailey's presentation of the psychological interaction between the kidnapers and the hostages convincing or stereotypical?

5. What aspects of international terrorism are stressed in the novel?

Does the story in any way suggest a solution to this great problem?

Literary Precedents

For its focus on international terrorism, *The Evening News* novel can be related to John Le Carre's *The Little Drummer Girl* (1983), Tom Clancy's *Patriot Games* (1987), and Robert Ludlum's *The Icarus Agenda* (1988), even if its investigation of the causes and consequences of terrorism is much less detailed than in these works.



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