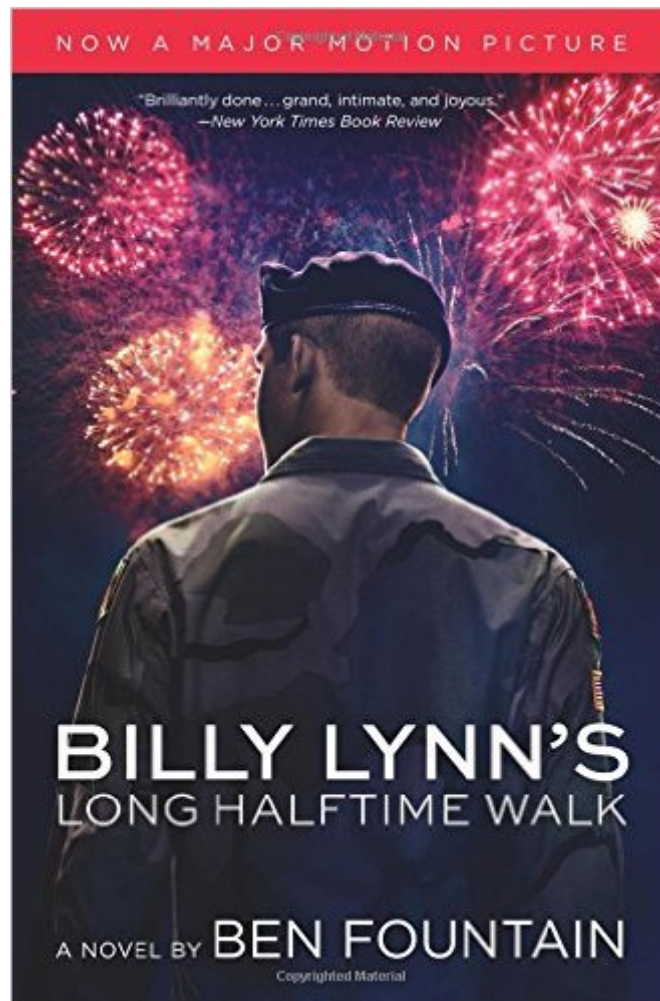


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Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk: A Novel



Synopsis

New York Times Bestseller Now a Major Motion Picture "Brilliantly done . . . grand, intimate, and joyous." "New York Times Book Review" "Mothers, father, sons, and daughters: read this giant-hearted novel." "MARIA SEMPLE, author of *Where'd You Go, Bernadette* Three minutes and forty-three seconds of intensive warfare with Iraqi insurgents "caught on tape by an embedded Fox News crew" has transformed the eight surviving men of Bravo Squad into America's most sought-after heroes. Now they're on a media-intensive nationwide tour to reinvigorate public support for the war. On this rainy Thanksgiving Day, the Bravos are guests of a Dallas football team, slated to be part of the halftime show. Among the Bravos is nineteen-year-old Specialist Billy Lynn. Surrounded by patriots sporting flag pins on their lapels and support our troops bumper stickers, he is thrust into the company of the team's owner and his coterie of wealthy colleagues; a born-again cheerleader; a veteran Hollywood producer; and supersized players eager for a vicarious taste of war. Over the course of this day, Billy will drink and brawl, yearn for home and mourn those missing, face a heart-wrenching decision and discover pure love and a bitter wisdom far beyond his years. Poignant, riotously funny, and exquisitely heartbreaking, Billy Lynn's *Long Halftime Walk* is a searing and powerful novel that has cemented Ben Fountain's reputation as one of the finest writers of his generation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

When I first heard about this book (and Karl Marlantes' blurb), I assumed it was written by a veteran - it isn't, and that's really amazing, because this is a pitch-perfect look into a soldier's experiences. I

say that as a veteran (of Desert Storm) and an embedded journalist in Iraq in 2007-09, so I have some first-hand knowledge with what he describes. To me, the voices and actions of the characters are dead-on accurate. It's got some flaws, which I'll get to first so I can finish strong. In my mind, the flaws are because he's trying so hard at writing something big and memorable, and it gets away from him at times. The conclusion veers into melodrama. Up until the last 40 pages or so, I could pretty much buy the events as possible real-life occurrences. But the end features a couple moments where I couldn't quite suspend disbelief. While the civilians he describes behave realistically, there's times when it feels very much like the author's "meta rant" against the American mindset - he sets up some characters as one-dimensional straw men so he can show his disdain. I agree with what he's presenting, but it doesn't always feel like a story - more like he's trying to inject a point into the fictional narrative. Which is fine, but not if it's obvious like it sometime is. Most of the time, the story is told in present-day perspective with some flashbacks. Very occasionally, he switches into describing the future, and that's awkward. For me, I would have liked no 'future look' at all. So, okay, those things threw me off. Everything else is very strong. Marlantes called it a "Catch 22" of the Iraq War - but that's not accurate, because to me it's not really a satire.

Plenty have summed up the plot of this book; if you've arrived at the page and are reading reviews, it's safe to say you know at least the rough outlines of the story. So I'll forego that.... A colleague of mine likes telling this story: his wife finally asks him what he's reading after he repeatedly laughs out loud. He replies to her, "A war novel." There's a bitterness that underlies it all, to be sure (see my back-and-forth with one of the one-star curmudgeons for more on that), but that bitterness is frequently offset by Fountain's hip, hilarious, dead on observations and wonderfully fresh cache of similes. Here are just a (very) few examples: "She performed with a multitasky air of distractedness, like she was watering plants while talking on the phone..." "She was still capable of sad, skewed smiles from time to time, forcing the cheer like Christmas lights in the poor part of town..." "His complexion is the ruddled, well-scrubbed pink of an old ketchup stain..." "Billy makes a few of the cheerleaders for strippers--they have the tough slizzard look of the club pro--but most of them could be college girls with their fresh good looks, their pert noses and smooth necks, their scrubbed, unsullied air of wholesome voluptuousness..." "They're just so pretty and genuinely nice, and toned, good God, their bodies firm as steel belted radials...." "Their wonderful breasts keep noodging up against his arms, setting off sensory bells and whistles like a run of bonus points in a video game..." "Back in the locker room the players have almost finished suiting up. The air is a pungent casserole of plastics, b.o.

Every war in the twentieth century has given us quality literature, some great, some not. "All Quiet on the Western Front, For Whom the Bell Tolls, Slaughterhouse Five, Catch 22, The Things They Carried" were great. "Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk" is not. But like all literature, "Billy Lynn" holds up a mirror to America and the image is chilling. Billy Lynn and his fellow grunts in Bravo Team return to the states for a hero's welcome, only to be confronted by an America completely unfazed, totally uninvolved in the war. Like "All Quiet on the Western Front," "Billy Lynn" shows the puzzlement of troops who return from deadly battle only to see a complete disconnection in civilian society. America appreciates Bravo's efforts, politely expresses their support for the troops, but don't interrupt America's quest for materialism and pursuit of our right to happiness. Ben Fountain draws an excellent portrait of America's ambivalence towards the Iraqi War, something that we've never seen before. In all other wars (except for the brief Desert Storm), our troops were primarily drafted, pulled reluctantly into harm's way. Families everywhere had someone or knew someone in the service. Casualties and deaths reverberated through communities reminding everyone that it could have been their son or nephew. It was this reverberation, the cry of mothers, which ended the Viet Nam War. Young men had no control over their lives. Authors explored the ancient Greek concept of determinism: how much of our lives are determined by things we cannot control, such as chance and the environment in which we live.

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