

■ Book review

Brad Land stylishly powers readers through his disturbing memoirs

Melodic literary prose gives beauty to the ugliness of a brutal attack and broken brotherhood in 'Goat'

BY JOSH LINTEREUR
PULSE REPORTER

Narrator Brad Land's hands repeatedly tremble and anxiety pervades his mind long before a random and brutal attack shatters his already fragile psyche at the opening of his memoir, "Goat."

Still sorting through the emotional repercussions of the assault, he pledges to a fraternity as a remedy for the estrangement he

feels, but he finds sanctioned violence in the name of brotherhood. The author uses melodic prose and masterful pacing to explore male brutality and brotherhood in his melancholic debut.

The celebrated book, which first appeared last year and debuted on paperback in March, begins when Land is 19. He and his younger brother Brett are college students at a small university in their hometown, Florence, S.C., who share the dream of attending college together at Clemson University by winter. Similar to characters in a J.D. Salinger novel, they intensely smoke cigarettes and hold onto the last vestiges of their youth before world-weary adulthood sets in.

The brothers, just more than one year apart in age, are inseparable and share a complicated adoration for one another. Brad admires Brett's unshakable charisma and social dexterity, while Brett watches his brother's innate creativity with quiet reverence.

At the opening of the book the two brothers split up after a party. Brett leaves with a girl, and Brad goes home alone. Two strangers approach Brad outside of the party looking for a ride home. He rashly accepts. With stomach-sinking literary prose, he recounts the brutal assault that follows.

The psychological effects on Brad extend to Brett, who blames himself for not being there to protect his brother. The guilt creates a heart-breaking distance between the two that Brad tries to fix for the remainder of the story.

With the stylistic, episodic touch

of a short-story teller, Brad recounts how isolated the tragedy leaves him. He chronicles the widening gap between himself and Brett, who decides to go on to Clemson while he stays home. His parents are barely able to speak of the tragedy. His mother, a nurse, can only offer treatment for his physical scars and medication to help him sleep.

A year after the attack, Brad joins

his brother at Clemson and pledges the same fraternity. Brett watches his brother endure nightmarish hazing rituals and hates himself for it. Brad begins to see the equivocal nature of the violence perpetuated by his fraternity brothers and the violence by his unidentified assailants a year before.

The brothers' estrangement intensifies as Brad crumbles beneath the weight of buried pain and the sociable Brett recoils from the world. After Brad quits the fraternity, and with Brett on his way out, tragedy strikes once more as the brothers discover the emotional maturity they desperately need.

Land's book is as harrowing for its meditations on violence as it is profound for its understanding of young men. It probes the complicated relationship of brothers at the brink of adulthood while chronicling the painfully slow process of dealing with and burying the past. With the thematic weight of a piece of literature and the writing to back it up, "Goat" is a powerful memoir from a promising debut writer.

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