

B R I A N L A N C E

Warplay

War is infinite nuance. War is the universal story of human suffering and yearning, transcending cultures and languages, as told by Tolstoy. Told by girls and boys, Jews and goys. War eats with many mouths. War chews sirloin, lamb, rice, grape leaves, liver sausage, haddock, and challah. War is the encapsulating event of the entire human experience. We love war. We love in war. We hate war. We hate in war. We bear war. We bear in war. We bring war home, sit together throbbing on Kansas porches watching the bobbed-hair high school girls hold hands. Sleep with war in brass four-posters, Murphy's, cots, the banks of trout streams, stretchers, gutters, mud. Wake with war in all those places, the aftertaste of aperitifs in our air, clouds of chlorine gas. Wake in clouds of Chanel, or third-world knock-off scents mixed with the sweat and secretions of other pilgrims, seeking solace on the come-stained sheets of war's matron saints. Or maybe that's just the clawing of life on leave. Wake from the sear of habu sake. Wake amid a Guinness Stout-soothed night shading all remnants of home and whoever there waits. All the requisite hallmarks of rest and recuperation. War repeats.

War whispers in between top forty tracks. War rides in our backseats watching over our shoulders. War reaches up front and steers our cars, blind and reckless. War prefers halted traffic, the kind that leaves us no choice but to wait, to think, to suffer some more, to pretend we're not, to pretend we are. War loves headwork, lingering in cubicles. War qualifies us for benefits we might do better off without, or fear we don't deserve. We marry with war bearing brass rings at the altar. Raise children with war rumbling in our backyards, the backs of our minds. War slaps spouses. War draws blood and tears and blank stares. War shackles lunar cycles, sequesters serotonin. War digs trenches in

Flanders and the Somme, tunnels in South Vietnam, our neighborhood woods where we ran, sticks for swords, sticks for rifles, sticks to reflect the human race to create, maim, kill, create. War builds shacks and shanties, hootches and bunkers, spiderholes and Green Zones, McMansions and malls. And war penetrates them all, through and through, like the walls, no, bulkheads of tall ships. But war remodels as well as it storms and sails. War soils and sweeps.

War hangs heirlooms on walls. A machete from the Mikong. A sailor sword, tight-link gold chains binding the stingray skin grip, golden leaf and leviathan hilt, and the myth of a job never done well enough to match its neighbor the machete. War shelves the sands of Iwo Jima, charcoal black, stowed in a DelMonte jar—specialty selected fruit in syrup. If the victors reap the spoils, is the villains' shit luck passed onto them? Believing otherwise helps despite the clicking beads of history's fingered rosaries clicking Chosan, Khe Sanh, My Lai, Mogadishu, more and more until there are no victors or villains. War fills manila notepads with sketches of martyrs. War fills frames with martyrs too. Fills frames with discharge papers, with papers preventing the purchase of the guns once carried. Fills books with lies. Fills books with truths. War wrestles the dealers of definitions into submission. War prefers metal to concrete. War forges bronze, silver, gold, brass, and those other mysterious alloys dangling from nylon ribbons. Alloys pinned to puffed chests, alloy pins stuck in sunken chests, alloy six-penny nails piercing the six-foot planks of pine sea chests. War teaches us to wear them. War teaches us to toss them into grand canyons, suburban storm drains, reflection pools, cheering crowds, closets. War teaches us to send refrigerators and trash to Davy Jones, tease his reach with oil. War plunges donkeys to death in Smyrna, places them in power in America. War carries things and drops things.

War is a human fascination, a point of constant and unavoidable fixation in our collective consciousness like fucking and faking. War fertilizes poppy fields and paddies with shit and flesh, synthetics and things ferrous. War fertilizes the history and fiction of mankind. War fertilizes masterminds, writers and otherwise. War fertilizes the richest human fantasies, peace among them. War writes its own histories through puppet hands, masterminds and otherwise. War writes and writes and writes. War—

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