



THE HOOLIGANS OF KANDAHAR – NOT ALL WAR STORIES ARE HEROIC

JOSEPH KASSABIAN – **1 STARS**

I wanted to give this book 5-stars, but –

I don't like writing reviews about books I don't like.

I wanted to like this book. I wanted it to be worthy of 5-stars. I wanted it to be an eye-opening read highlighting the travesties of war. I wanted it to shout out about how insane it is to send children to another land to fight a battle against other children, to make the world a safer place—regardless of the “reality” of the causes they are protecting us for.

Anytime someone dares to share their story, to allow us into his or her lives, laying themselves bare for us to learn and feel from his or her experiences is without question: gutsy. Joseph deserves 5-stars for the courage to put pen to paper.

However, ...that's where it ends. In a nutshell, a whack of immature individuals who are expendable to society enlists to protect us from the world's evils (perhaps to escape their mundane lives). They ship out to the Middle East where they encounter stifling boredom and a culture that maybe “our way of life” ravages under the guise of “the better good.” The book claims “not all war stories are heroic.” A tagline that piqued my interest—bringing out thoughts of a touch of civility or common humanity would grace the pages. However, instead, the pages are littered with pointless bravado, the demeaning of other humans, all Afghanistan people are painted with the same brush, not worthy of compassion or decency. Hell, even in the words of the author, if you weren't part of the author's troop, you to could become a target of childish name calling or worse.

I think a great opportunity was missed to humanize the gallant individuals who serve, and the people who are identified as enemies. The Hooligans of Kandahar isn't a story about the horrors of combat or bringing humanity together. The picture it paints is it is questionable what society is inflicting on these individuals and how it destroys many of them by making it uncertain if they'll ever be able to function in society again. There wasn't a single character (real people) in the book that I found likeable. Joseph comes across as full of bravado and boastful to a fault. The descriptions were overblown, tiresome and at times pointless, with page-after-page filled with dribble such as; comparing the conditions of the barracks in Afghanistan to finally going to Paris only to find it smelled like (excrement). There is no context where that would make sense. I give the creative writing teacher a FAILING grade.

MY THOUGHTS ON THE WORDS OF OTHERS!

At the book's midpoint, Joseph trips into a moment of tremendous vulnerability when he travels back to the States on leave and realises, he's damaged, and fitting in outside of a combat zone may have been stripped from his cards. I loved these pages. He became relatable. His emotional walls started crumbling. Only a few pages later, the book shifted back to immaturity, bravado, and more tedious descriptions.

If you enjoy stories about soldiers masturbating, drinking heavily, and behaving like they are the saviours of our world with zero regards for the societies they are invading, you may love this book.

If you enjoy reading about how every single person the main character doesn't like or see as human, be described as fat, stupid or ugly, you will love this book.

In the spirit of illustrating the line above, near the end of the book, over the course of less than one page, instead of turning toward a positive, uplifting message, the author chose to describe female American troopmates in the following bent: "...three short incredibly overweight women..." He motioned to the fat girls..." "...turned to the fat girls..." "The three fat girls..." "More like the Female eating team..." "I assumed the collection of fat chicks..."

I'll stop.

"Not all war stories are heroic" – nailed it.

After reading about the *"fat"* –I understood no epiphany, moment of growth; or uplifting moment was forthcoming. I guess it was foolish of me to think it was; any chance of "the greater good" was lost by sending children to war to fight with other children at war.

I may be naïve. I believe most people on this spinning rock are trying to get through their days scathed as little as possible. I think regardless of where you live most people want to go home eat dinner with loved ones and try to leave the world a touch better than the day before.

I don't believe the boogeyman is out to get us and the only way we'll be safe is by sending our disposable youth over to –

Joseph missed an opportunity to mend the gap between cultures by choosing to drop on us another US vs. THEM story about faceless enemies who are out to get us – that is why I gave this book 1-Star.

In hindsight: if I wanted a story about divisiveness, which in my opinion: this is, I'd turn on the tube and listen to whatever the politicians are spewing on any day.
