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Meltzer, Brad and Josh Mensch. *The First Conspiracy: The Secret Plot to Kill George Washington*. New York: Flatiron Books, 2019. 391 pp. Illustrations. $17.35 Hardback. ISBN 978-1-250-13033-4

Here Comes The General: The Pride of Mount Vernon

“The air is alive […] and the world is about to change.”

An energized-yet-nostalgic feeling has taken America by storm. In what could be called the *Hamilton* Effect, mainstream media and pop culture has a newfound fascination towards life in Colonial America prior to and immediately after the American Revolution. Capitalizing on this nostalgia is none other than bestselling writer Brad Meltzer.

Known for his Culper Ring series, Brad Meltzer is no stranger to the world of assassination attempts and Presidents. Set in Colonial America, *The First Conspiracy: The Secret Plot to Kill George Washington* immerses the reader into a rarely known, pivotal moment in a fledgling United States that could have very well changed the course of American history. As opposed to his other works, Meltzer draws from real-world accounts and frames the narrative around those facts. Aiding him in achieving this, Meltzer has brought in Josh Mensch who assists him in crafting his first non-fiction book. Through research, this book essentially becomes a secondary source rather than the historical fiction thrillers the Meltzer fandom is accustomed to. By doing so, Meltzer avoids the common mistake authors encounter when undertaking such a task- historical revisionism.

Coming in over 300 pages, this book runs the risk of becoming an exhaustive task. Meltzer does well in avoiding this through his style. For those unfamiliar with his style, this may need some getting used to. But it does pay off. Although many may find his short chapters and redundant sentences irritating, this book finds a way of keeping the reader engaged and provides reminders as to important details in the story. Additionally, in utilizing third-person and present tense the story can be read as if the events are happening in real time. In return, this causes the reader to feel more connected to the characters. However, one pitfall is that this book does have an extensive cast of characters. As a result, some of these do go with minimal development. Fortunately, this is not the case for the titular character George Washington.

Throughout this narrative, we see much more than a global superpower form. We see a world-class leader grow. In the Prelude, we are presented with a twenty-something year-old who has lost everyone: his father, mother, and stepbrother. From the get-go, Washington displays the characteristics of a leader as he goes from the Lost Boy stereotype to soldier. Eventually, we see him become the archetypical Commander. Without a doubt, this book shines a spotlight on George Washington the Leader, without neglecting George Washington the Human.

With this new book under his belt, the question is: what comes next for Brad Meltzer? After all, he has publicly stated that he is on hiatus from the Culper Ring series. Nonetheless, with this book Meltzer has once again introduced the readers to his world of American spies. Moreover, now the avid readers- as well as the casual weekend skimmer- have available to them the historical premise on which Meltzer has previously built his books on. We shall wait and see, but for meanwhile we can appreciate this much-needed piece in a time where American leadership is being threatened.