



American Subversive

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American Subversive: A Novel

American Subversive Details

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Author : David Goodwillie

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From Reader Review American Subversive for online ebook

Scott Seaborn says

American Subversive is Goodwillie's debut novel-- so I'll start with the positives. The novel is a well-written page-turner. Goodwillie is very efficient in his language, and the dialog really flows.

Unfortunately, I hated every single character in this book. It was extremely difficult to identify with self-absorbed hipsters and terrorists. I didn't care about the people, ergo I didn't care about the story.

I'll try to summarize the plot without spoiling the story:

Unlikeable counter-culture terrorist chick (Paige) blows shit up in NYC. Unlikeable hipster blogger (Aiden) searches for Paige, using his journalistic skills. NYC hipsters are mopey and apathetic after 9/11. Aiden is obsessed with Paige because she represents the anger and action that NYC hipsters have been repressing. Aiden's friends are unlikeable trust fund kids, and Paige's acquaintances are terrorists-- and I was kinda hoping they'd all get blown up. Instead, they compete to see who can build the grandest political soapbox. Lots of talking. And more talking.

Goodwillie's future is bright, and I *may* even pick up his next novel. Unfortunately, I loathed Paige and Aiden-- but I'm sure a lot of people will enjoy this novel--especially those who identify with counter-culture politics or the hipster scene.

Lynn says

Liked it, even though it felt kind of amateur. And the author got his facts wrong - the parents of the protagonist supposedly met when they were juniors together at Yale at a time when Yale was not co-ed. And one of the minor characters could be me, reduced to the stereotype of which I am a member. But this last is maybe why I liked it - a hint of how my kids' see my generation.

The story, about eco-terrorists, moves along, the characters were believable to me. Good quick read.

Clay says

A disappointed idealist turned terrorist, and a New York blogger on her tracks. A gripping read that jumps back and forth in time, suggesting that not all Americans are willing to settle for rich, fat and happy. A Kenyon College graduate, the author worked as a private investigator and as dot com and Sotheby's worker, building up experiences that ground the book in reality.

Tommy says

The premise of this book (ecoterrorists blow stuff up without killing anyone) is intriguing, as is the use of two narrators (one of the terrorists and the blogger tracking her down). But the plot takes a couple of less-

than-believable turns, and the author lets one of the narrators (the more self-absorbed, less interesting one) take over for most of the second half. I'm not sure why *The New York Times* named this one of the best novels of the year.

Diane says

About young twenty somethings who are so disillusioned with America that they become part of revolutionary groups a la the Weathermen of the 60's and 70's.

I found this very thought provoking. It makes me think about our country today and the spoiled young people who have a me-first attitude while they accumulate stuff at the cost of the environment to benefit the fat cats of business. Sometimes it's good to see a few revolutionaries who want to shine a light on issues to help wake up the complacent Americans.

warren Cassell says

Based on several excellent advance reviews, I reserved a copy of "American Subversive" at the library. Big mistake. Supposedly a thriller about home-grown terrorists, I found the writing to be pedestrian, the characters vapid and the plot not to believed. I wasn't thrilled and stopped after sixty pages. You could save time by not even starting it--but that's what horse races are all about.

Marian says

As you might expect from a political thriller, American Subversive is fast paced, gripping and a serious page turner. Now, I'm not a thriller kind of girl but this book is un-freaking-believable. Seriously. The concept is so timely (blogging and terrorism) and I actually found it easy to relate to the main characters (Goodwillie writes from the perspective of a woman - how cool is that?).

The relationship between said characters (two narrators: blogger and terrorist) is complicated but innocent, with intertwining facets you find yourself constantly thinking about long after the final page.

Aidan, failed journalism student turned gossip blogger on a site that eerily resembles Gawker, is both completely unlikeable (but with good intentions) and the kind of protagonist you root for from beginning to end. Paige, a very sad but very determined eco-terrorist is responsible for turning 2010 Manhattan into chaos. It's horribly familiar to those of us who lived through 9/11, which makes it a relevant and necessary read.

As a fun side note, I hear Aidan's blog (Roorback.com) is actually being turned into a real site... stay tuned...

Liza says

From the very beginning of this story, Goodwillie catches his readers up in a sense of intrigue and secrecy, at

the heart of which are real human characters. The distinguishing element of this novel, for me, is the honesty with which it seems to be written. Goodwillie seems to reveal essential truths about what it is to be human, to be emotionally driven, to be idealistic, and to discover love through respect. Furthermore, this book presents a subtle commentary throughout on what it means to be an American, what America stands for and should represent.

For all its theoretical, reflective and intellectually stimulating content, *American Subversive* tells a whopping good story. It is engaging, entertaining and well-crafted. The narrative construction is original and well-suited to the story presented.

I loved this book, and I loved it more for how unexpectedly great it was in so many little ways. I would recommend this to everyone!

spencer says

A smart, beautiful woman gets struck with a bad case of malaise and becomes a terrorist. Deconstructing the plot that way makes it sound absurd, but Goodwillie manages to pull it off with modest success. That being said, you have a fairly typical navel-gazing story about people being bored with life in New York, which is told with great alacrity. You know there is something amiss when you would rather the characters spend their time talking at a party, where they are being interesting, rather than when they are making a bomb. Literary thrillers are a rare species because it is hard to write characters, dialog, and plot all at once. Goodwillie can do the first two with no trouble whatsoever. Hopefully for his next book he can figure out the third part, then we would be in for a serious treat.

Jill says

American Subversive is a book about belief turned inside-out. It's an intelligent and literary thriller, a thought-provoking peek into America's dark soul, and a veritable page turner. It's also the debut book for David Goodwillie, an author who is up to the task of unearthing the country's seductive roots.

The dual protagonists/narrators are Aidan Cole, a member of the chattering class, who blogs for Roorback, ("a roorback is a defamatory falsehood published for political effect") and Paige Roderick, an attractive idealist who is involved in an act of domestic terrorism at the midtown Manhattan location of Barney's. One late night, at a glitterati party following this act, Aidan checks his email to view an image of a woman crossing Madison Avenue (the site of the bombing) with the words, "This is Paige Roderick. She's the one responsible."

But Goodwillie is too good to settle for a "who-done-it" thriller. He delves deeply into his characters to reveal two alienated and unmoored thirty-somethings who are dealing with a profound disillusionment based on divorce, death, a country that lost its way, and friendships that easily turn into betrayals.

Paige turns to domestic radicalism after the wasteful death of her brother Bobby in Iraq. She says, "Do you really want to know my worldview? Because it's pretty bleak these days. Everything I once saw as a problem with others -- the numbness, the detachment, the disillusionment that came with being American -- everything I once sought to fix...I'm coming now to feel myself." And Aidan? His transformation is less organic. He reflects, "A decade had passed in the back of countless cabs, at fancy dinners and midnight pizzerias; the drug dipping and surprisingly functional alcoholism that consumed our days and destroyed our mornings; nothing stimulating nothing surprising, our thirties spread out before us like our twenties, but with lessons unlearned."

There is a sadness in these characters, a lack of connection that makes them ripe for subversion. Aidan's emptiness and ennui primes him for a connection with Paige, who is intense and filled with purpose -- everything he is not, although interestingly, they are more intriguing characters alone and not together. Neither fall into stock stereotypes; rather, they are two-dimensional with distinct voices and a great deal of vulnerability. Only in the last 50 or so pages does the authorial voice intercede, momentarily reminding the reader that Goodwillie is creating these characters and pulling the strings.

I read this book right after NYC dodged a bullet with a Times Square car bombing, and gasped at how unwittingly prophetic this book really is. It's a spot-on view of not only domestic terrorism, but a jaded Manhattan at the bulls-eye of today's digital age. (4.5)

Monica says

Maybe I ask too much of books. Maybe I'd just like a story to be believable, and for authors not to rewrite history.

I enjoyed this book at first, although I was repeatedly frustrated by Goodwillie's portrayal of Paige, the activist, and the history he gives (through her) of the WTO protests, Earth Liberation Front, etc. For example, according to the book, at the WTO, the cops only started firing teargas after getting pelted with rocks and such. Uh, not. Also, the black bloc folks smashed in the windows of Starbucks mainly because they were hungry.

Also, Paige is quickly recruited to start doing covert direct action by people she doesn't really know that well--friends of her deceased brother. They just quickly open up to her and let her in. Unrealistic. And it's also unbelievable that she goes underground so quickly, leaving her grieving parents behind, after having quit her job to spend more time with them. As a reader, I only got the sense that she cared about the environment (she had worked for an environmental non-profit), and was good at the covert direct action. Yes, she was upset about the death of her brother in the war, but I feel like I wasn't shown the process of how she came to take more radical actions.

However, the character of the journalist is well-developed, and I like Goodwillie's description of the journalist's life in Manhattan a lot more. It appears that Goodwillie is just better at writing what he knows. That said, I found his actions rather unbelievable.

All that said, it was a decent read, though I skimmed through to the end when it got a bit over-the-top for my taste.

Billpilgrim says

Paige Roderick's brother dies while serving in Iraq, and this event jars her to such an extent that first she becomes an activist, then a revolutionary. She joins a small cell that plans Actions, i.e. bombings, which are not intended to kill, but to draw attention to the target, which would be some corporation, and thereby expose its misdeeds, and through that process alone put a stop to them.

Aidan Cole is a thirty-something Manhattanite, living a self-absorbed life, working as a blogger who comments on the media, and partying the nights away with others of his ilk. He is friends with a rich South American playboy, and he is in the middle of breaking up with his girlfriend, although he does not yet fully realize that. Then, out of the blue, he gets an anonymous e-mail identifying a culprit in a recent terrorist bombing in New York City. Attached to the email is a photograph, showing a young woman, Paige Roderick, as she is crossing the street outside the site of the bombing, the Barney's building. Instead of immediately posting the picture on his blog, he decides to investigate and try to find the woman.

The book then describes how this decision affects Aidan's life. At the beginning of the book, we see that he and Paige are in hiding in separate locations, fugitives from the authorities, and what we are reading has been written by each of them to explain how they got to that point. The book alternates between the writings of each of them, occasionally jumping forward to showing Aidan in hiding.

I found the book very enjoyable and engrossing. The only problem that I have with it was that it occasionally becomes a monologue, with one of the characters speaking at length to describe a history or to state a political viewpoint. I found this technique to be annoying.

Al Swanson says

After reading the synopsis, I was really excited about this book. It didn't disappoint through the first two thirds, either.

Most of the time, a book with action as the centerpoint, like action movies these days, has to go over the top. I appreciated that the author thought enough of the audience not to go to extremes. The action in the book is realistic and while violent, doesn't involve killing scores of people to be effective. Too, it can be argued that the action is a mere sidebar and the real story is the two main characters and their reasons for becoming 'American Subversives'.

However, there's a couple problems with the book - and perhaps they can be attributed to the fact that it is a first novel. One of the main characters decides, after a very insignificant incident (though the author tries to play up that significance), to abandon his ideals and go to extremes. True, the author tries to show later on that perhaps that change wasn't so sudden and had been evolving, but I wasn't convinced of that at all.

The other, and far more bothersome, problem is the dialog, especially during scenes where characters try to explain their reasonings and past. No one speaks the way they do in these long drawn-out monologues. It simply wasn't believable. I was going to copy/paste some examples, but there's not much point. It's not so bad as to overshadow the entire book, but it's pretty bad in places.

Worth reading? Really, that's the only question in the end. Was it worth the time? Sure. I'd read another novel by the same author as well. I hope, however, that the next novel is a little more seasoned and edited and the characters and dialog a bit more developed.

Nick says

I knew I was the target audience for this book when I read the NYT review, but I wasn't prepared for the sheer quality of the narrative drive and the appeal of the characters and story. This is the story of a contemporary pseudo-hipster blogger in New York who gets tied up with an alleged radical via a mysterious email with a photo. He begins a search that transforms his life, and for us, the reader: we must know what the fuck happened! Like a whodunit, more like a whodunnit-and-why. Texture, vibe, cultural references --- all spot on. The nostalgia factor was also big for me. A top read this year. Excellent.

Kate says

There are some pithy descriptions of NYC, and, since I am teaching a NYC lit and history class at the moment, I found myself to be especially tuned in to these moments:

"There was a velocity to the city, a careening inevitability that became addictive. Everyone I knew felt it--the great rush of plans and possibilities--and we lived accordingly. What was it exactly? It was everything vibrating at once" (173).

As I think about moving out of the city in the next couple of months, I do feel that I will miss this velocity.
