

The Standard Grand

Jay Baron Nicorvo

Four characters converge on an abandoned Catskills resort in this ambitious novel set in 2012. Vietnam veteran Milton Wright, whose wife's family owned the property in its Borscht Belt heyday, has converted it into the Standard Grand, a halfway house for homeless vets. Antebellum Smith, an army specialist sleeping in Central Park rather than face a third deployment (or her husband), becomes Wright's last hope to inherit the organization after his imminent death. Meanwhile, a multinational corporation with its own designs on the land has dispatched both a mercenary to infiltrate the group and a Mesoamerican negotiator to buy Wright out. As these different protagonists (and several others, including a cougar) jockey for position within the narrative, it's often unclear what story is truly being told, though Bellum eventually emerges as the novel's center. In its portrait of a country exhausted by war and drenched in conspiracies, poet Nicorvo's (*Deadbeat: Poems*) fiction debut is the spiritual heir to Robert Stone's Vietnam-era classic *Dog Soldiers*. Its depiction of the breathtaking but treacherous New York State mountains is reminiscent of Smith Henderson's similarly vivid *Fourth of July Creek*. **VERDICT** Regardless of the parallels found in other authors' earlier works, in capturing the story of one deserter's search for love and redemption in an increasingly corporatized America, Nicorvo carves out something truly original.

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