



Newsworld (Pitt Drue Heinz Lit Prize)

Todd James Pierce

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News is “one of the few things that connects us as a nation” observes the protagonist in the title story of *Newsworld*, a new collection by Todd James Pierce that explores America’s obsession with news and entertainment culture. The characters in “Newsworld” seek to design realistic theme park attractions, such as “OJ’s Bronco: The Ride” and “Seige at Waco,” that allow park guests to experience the complexities of contemporary news events for themselves. In the story “Columbine: The Musical,” high school students stage a musical written as a means of discussing school violence, while their vice principal wrangles a 10 percent discount on a school security system in exchange for corporate sponsorship of the play. In “Wrestling Al Gore,” a national wrestling federation uses costumed wrestlers to cast the Gore/Bush election recount into the ring. In an ironic twist, fans become sympathetic to the underdog Gore, champion his cause, and ultimately reflect on the fate of the real politician. In “The Yoshi Compound: A Story of Post-Waco Texas,” the followers of the Dalai Yoshi amass weapons and riot gear in hopes of attracting media attention in order to spread their message of love and world peace.

The characters in *Newsworld*, like many Americans, are engulfed in a life-imitating-art phenomenon caused by the hyperreality presented in the media, and they struggle with this overwhelming influence trying to understand whether their own lives fall within or outside its domain.

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