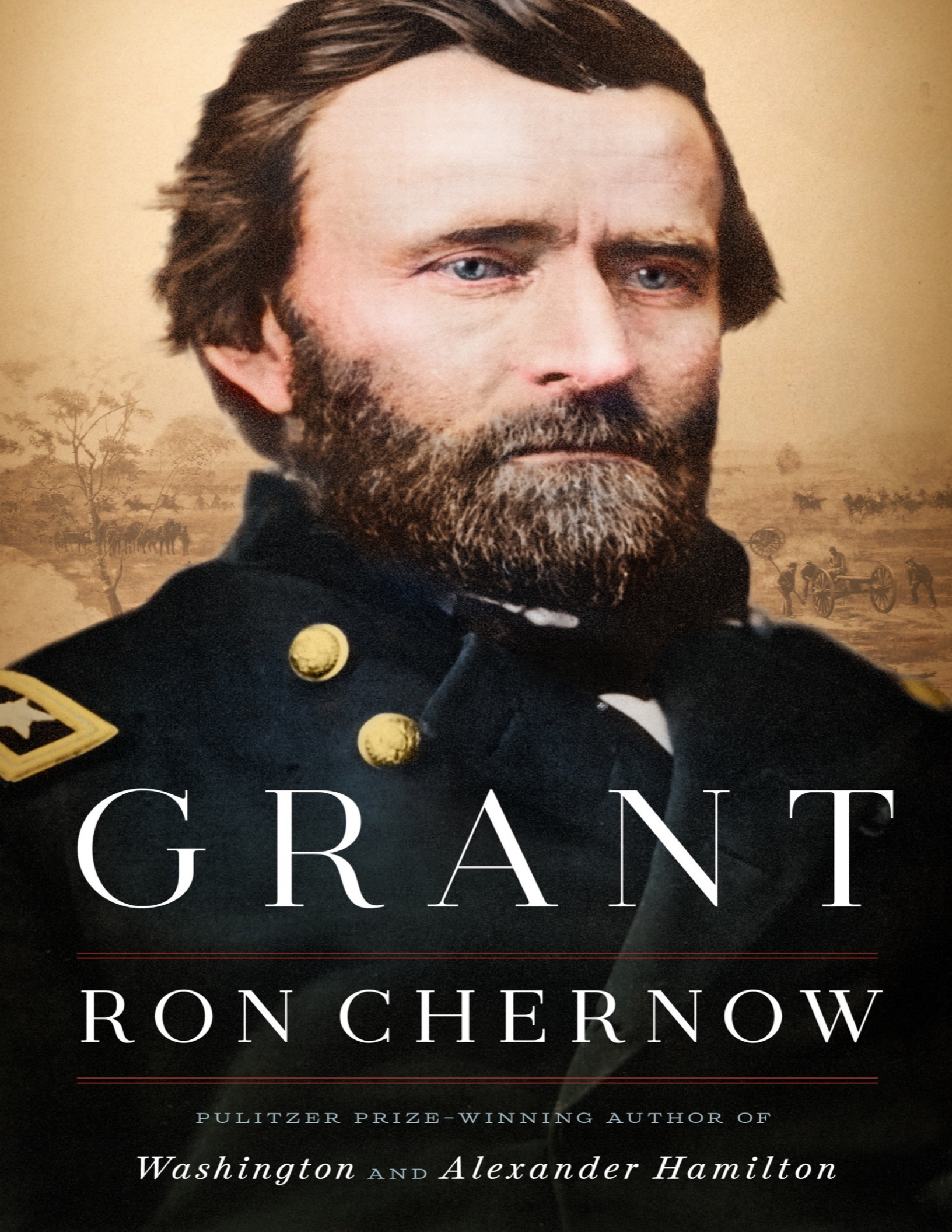




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RON CHERNOW

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*To my loyal readers,
who have soldiered on through my lengthy sagas*

What a man he is! what a history! what an illustration—his life—of the capacities of that American individuality common to us all. Cynical critics are wondering “what the people can see in Grant” to make such a hubbub about. They aver . . . that he has hardly the average of our day’s literary and scholastic culture, and absolutely no pronounc’d genius or conventional eminence of any sort. Correct: but he proves how an average western farmer, mechanic, boatman, carried by tides of circumstances, perhaps caprices, into a position of incredible military or civil responsibilities . . . may steer his way fitly and steadily through them all, carrying the country and himself with credit year after year—command over a million armed men—fight more than fifty pitch’d battles—rule for eight years a land larger than all the kingdoms of Europe combined—and then, retiring, quietly (with a cigar in his mouth) make the promenade of the whole world, through its courts and coteries, and kings and czars and mikados . . . as phlegmatically as he ever walk’d the portico of a Missouri hotel after dinner . . . Seems to me it transcends Plutarch. How those old Greeks, indeed, would have seized on him! A mere plain man—no art, no poetry . . . A common trader, money-maker, tanner, farmer of Illinois—general for the republic . . . in the war of attempted secession—President following, (a task of peace, more difficult than the war itself)—nothing heroic, as the authorities put it—and yet the greatest hero. The gods, the destinies, seem to have concentrated upon him.

WALT WHITMAN, *Specimen Days*

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