



# BEYOND THE BESTSELLERS

## January 2014 - FICTION

### **Hild: A Novel**

Griffith, Nicola - 2013 – 543 p. Setting: 7th Century Britain

FIC GRIFFITH

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A good historical novel has a special magic that immerses the reader in another time. This novel, about the early life and times of St. Hilda of Whitby, does just that. The author interweaves facts about jewelry, textiles, languages, food, weapons, coins and poetry of 7<sup>th</sup> century England into the suspenseful story of court intrigue through the eyes of a very perceptive child. The story begins when Hild is three and her father is poisoned by his enemies. Her conniving mother ties the family's fortune to Edwin Snakebeard, soon to be King. Hild becomes his seer at a very young age and must work to keep his favor, a not-so-easy task in a court divided between those who want power and those who have it. Old gods and Christianity influence the various factors in court, and warfare with those from other lands who want to rule England is never-ending. Details of everyday life help give the novel a sense of authenticity, even though very little is known about the real St. Hilda. The author includes a glossary to help with the four languages spoken in England at the time.

This is the first installment about St. Hilda and sure to be of interest to those who enjoy historical fiction. I am already looking forward to the next one. — Sandi

### **Spirit of Steamboat: a Walt Longmire Story**

Johnson, Craig - 2013 - 146 p. Setting: December 24, 1988, Wyoming

M FIC JOHNSON

On Christmas Eve, 1988 lawman Walt Longmire convinces his friend, the irascible former sheriff Lucian Connally, that he needs him to fly an emergency mission. A young Asian girl has been badly burned in a car crash and needs to be airlifted to Denver in a blizzard. Lucian has already had three glasses of bourbon, but he is the only pilot who can fly Steamboat, a decommissioned World War II bomber. And Steamboat is the only plane that might have a chance to make it. Five adults risk their lives in this harrowing journey to try and save the critically injured young girl. Their chances of survival are slim at best. But they have to try. Will the "Spirit of Steamboat" produce a miracle? — Robbin

### **This is Paradise**

Kahakauwila, Kristiana - 2013 - 235 p.

Setting: contemporary Hawaii,

SS FIC KAHAKAUWILA

In these six short stories, we are invited to see Hawaii from the lives of ordinary people. In the first story we see the tension that exists between the locals and the tourists. A young girl is warned by the locals that the man she is with has been in prison and is probably dangerous. The girl eschews their warning -- after all, this is paradise — what could happen in paradise? When the locals see on the news that her body was found on a local beach they wonder if they could have done more to save her. The second story tells of a girl who takes over her father's cock fighting operation to get revenge for some old wrong. In the end she realizes that sometimes revenge isn't worth what it costs. In the last story, a dying father must pass on the family ranch to a son who lives off-island and has secrets of his own that may keep him from running the ranch and making peace with his family.

This is recommended for anyone who likes a quick read, a good story or likes to try new authors. — Kathy

## **Critical Mass**

Paretsky, Sara - 2013 - 465 p. Setting: Present-day Chicago, 1930s-40s Austria

M FIC PARETSKY

V.I. Warshawski (Victoria Iphigenia, aka Vic) is a Chicago private eye of Polish/Italian descent. In Paretsky's seventeenth book, Vic's best friend Lotty, an elderly Austrian-born doctor whose family died in the Holocaust, asks her to look into what has happened to Judy, the drug-addicted daughter of her childhood playmate Kitty. After tracking Judy to a rural meth house where she's nowhere to be found and discovering the body of a drug dealer, Vic goes to Kitty for more information and discovers that Judy's son Martin, who Kitty raised, has also gone missing. Kitty hires Vic to find Martin. What follows is a convoluted story that moves from women physicists in pre-war Austria to present-day Metargon, the computer company where Martin worked and whose founder worked on the Manhattan Project and was most noted for designing a breakthrough computer in the 1950s. All the major characters have secrets, lies and silences that Vic must break through to finally solve all the puzzles. A hard-hitting, complicated story that will keep you fully engaged. — Ginny

## **Eleanor & Park**

Rowell, Rainbow - 2013 - 328 p. Setting: Omaha, Nebraska in 1986

FIC ROWELL

In the suburbs of Omaha in 1986, two misfit teenagers come together in a whirlwind romance that takes everyone by surprise. Eleanor, at sixteen, is living in a broken home with an abusive stepfather and four younger siblings, all of whom share a single room. At school, she suffers abuse because of her large frame and awkward taste in clothing. But everything changes when she meets Park. Park is the half-Korean son of a tough-as-nails army veteran, and feels just as misplaced in his family as Eleanor does in hers. Together, Park and Eleanor share an incredible and almost immediate connection. *Eleanor & Park* is a charming and realistic glimpse into teenage love, especially in the midst of considerable adversity. A must-read YA title for fans of John Green. -- Juliana

## **The Maid's Version**

Woodrell, Daniel - 2013 – 164 p. Setting: 1920s & beyond in West Table, Missouri

FIC WOODRELL

Self-described "country noir" writer Daniel Woodrell's (*The Outlaw Album, Winter's Bone*, etc.) latest book is culled from historical events. Twelve year old Alek Dunahew spends the summer of 1965 with his grandmother Alma. One night during a storm she shares a long-kept story with him: ". . . she cunningly chose that raging moment to begin telling me her personal account of the Arbor Dance Hall explosion of 1929, how forty-two dancers from this small corner of the Missouri Ozarks had perished in an instant. . . and why it happened . . . a great crime or colossal accident, an ongoing mystery she thought she'd solved. I knew this was a story my dad did not want me to hear from her lips, as it was a main source of their feud, so I was tickled and keen to hear more . . ." In 1989, the angel on the fire victims' tomb appears to dance, reigniting interest in the story and Alek's father says, "Tell it. Go on and tell it." Alek unspools the heartbreaking tale bit by bit, introducing suspects, dance hall-goers, and Alma's family. It's beautifully told, historically interesting, and perfectly crafted. — Deb

## **A Beautiful Truth**

McAdam, Colin - 2013 – 292 p. Setting: 1970s Vermont & Florida

NH Downloadable eBook

Set in the 1970s, one half of this tale follows Walt and Judy, an infertile Vermont couple, who adopt a baby chimpanzee. Louee grows to be like a son in many amazing ways, but his wild side looms large as well, an ever-present barrier to the family's inclusion in "normal" society, and a potential safety threat. Walt and Judy's story alternates with a chronicle of a Florida chimp research lab, told largely from the viewpoint of the captives, using a half-invented language. The lab director strives to document the chimps' intelligence and empathy, but is largely at odds with the scientific community. As time goes on, the lab struggles for funding, and must turn in part to conducting grisly pharmaceutical experiments, a great torment to both the chimps and their caretakers.

As the stories progress and inevitably converge, McAdam does not gloss over the "primitive" and violent tendencies of both chimps and humans, but he also gives hope with his portrayals of affection and understanding, both within and between the species. A somewhat heavy, emotionally challenging, linguistically interesting and very thought-provoking read. — Anna