The Casual Reader

July 2017

THE CASUAL READER

Michelle Fields and Judy Howell, Editors

SEX LIES AND ONLINE DATING

If you are looking for a light summer read, you will probably love this book. I did, including all of the characters from the husky cat to the lovely Molly, Irish Setter, and our main characters Quinn and Lucy. A relationship based from the beginning on lies is doomed right? Not necessarily. Lucy, a mystery writer, is doing research for a serial killer character. Quinn is a policeman doing his job. It's a hilarious mix when Quinn thinks Lucy might be a serial killer. I don't want to spoil anything, but I laughed out loud a lot during this book. —Judy Howell


THE ESSEX SERPENT

The back of this novel compares it to an imaginary collaboration between Charles Dickens and Bram Stoker. I don’t feel it gets quite dark enough for the Stoker comparison, but it is certainly atmospheric. Set in 19th century England, The Essex Serpent tells the story of Cora Seaborne and Will Ransome, who become unlikely friends. Cora is a young widow, recovering from an abusive marriage and a tricky relationship with her young son. She is passionately interested in natural history, and when she hears rumors that the legendary Essex serpent has once more been seen, she sets out to find it for scientific study. Will Ransome is a vicar. Happily married and with several young children, he is reeling from the religious crisis the rumors of the serpent have instigated in his village. I loved this book with its brilliant prose and its complex characters. —Michelle Fields


RED RISING

For most people who read this book, they will immediately remember The Hunger Games. This was not true for me. It reminded me of Lord of the Flies. The novel describes a society divided by purpose and a caste system based on color. Darrow, the main character, is born to one group and moves into another. This introductory volume sets up the story and Darrow becomes the Reaper. The story is good. It does drag a bit in the middle. Overall it’s like a chess game. In the end I wondered who really was the winner? —JH

THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS

Last year I read Wyndham’s Day of the Triffids, which I enjoyed but didn’t love. A few weeks ago, I sat down with The Midwich Cuckoo and felt much more involved in proceedings. The premise is terrifying; one day everyone in a small English village falls unconscious. Anyone who tries to enter the village also slumps to the ground. About 24-36 hours later, everyone wakes up. Aside from a few tragic incidents, like the man who froze to death, everyone seems to be none the worse for wear...until it is later discovered that every woman of child-bearing age is pregnant. The book is set in the 1950s, so this is a shocking development and interesting to see how long it takes them to figure out the extent of the problem due to shame. When the children are born, they are eerie. They seem to be able to communicate telepathically with each other, and heaven help anyone who injures one of them...— MF

ADVENTURES OF A VEGAN VAMP

I wasn’t sure about this book, but I am so glad I read it. Meet Mallory. She woke up starving and unable to eat her normal food. Thinking possibly the flu, she went to the doctor and discovered that she has been infected with the vampire virus. That's right she's a vegan vampire. Being a baby vampire has really begun to mess up her happy. If you enjoy a funny and entertaining cozy mystery, you will enjoy this book. — JH

INTO THE WATER

I will admit that Into the Fire was not my favorite read of the summer, but it was fun. Many of the books that I have read this summer are not your normal person’s idea of a summer read, so it is refreshing occasionally to sit down with a best-selling thriller. Paula Hawkins is the author of The Girl on the Train. This book is slightly different from that one. It concentrates on a particular river and the women who frequently seem to drown in it. It is written from multiple perspectives, and looks at the most recent drowning victim as well as her friends, family and enemies. She was writing a book about the history of women drowning in this river, so you find out quite a bit about them as well. Into the Water will not make a list of the best books of the year, I suspect, but if you are looking for a good beach read, I think this fits the bill. — MF