

Staff Picks: Dactyl Hill Squad



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Reviewed by Ellen A.

Welcome to 1863 New York City, where dinosaurs roam the streets! Magdalys Roca and her fellow orphan friends are enjoying a field trip in the city when riots break out and a few of their group are kidnapped. It's up to Magdalys and the Dactyl Hill Squad to rescue their missing friends and defeat the evil magistrate, Riker.

This alternate history involving the U.S. Civil War, a diverse bunch of heroic orphans, and dinosaurs is quite a thrilling ride. The exciting adventure, written by Daniel José Older, also touches on deeper issues such as extreme racial injustice and fighting for what is right.

I'm looking forward to the second book in the series, Freedom Fire, to be released in May 2019.

Posted by Alejandria G. on January 17, 2019

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Monuments Men



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It's not often that a World War II film comes my way that stirs my soul. It's even rarer that what stirs my soul is not the personal story of an individual or a small group of people standing up for what is right against the Nazis or an escape from a German internment camp despite impossible odds. It's not that I don't enjoy a good war film, but most war films have the same basic features, [Read more](#)

Posted by Keith C. on December 26, 2014

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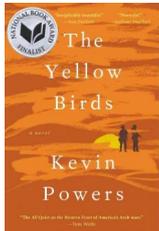
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The Yellow Birds



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I'm not one for war novels, but this little gem hooked me from the start. The writing is stellar and the characters speak and act with a naturalness that only comes from actual combat experience.

Kevin Powers, the author, is an Iraq War veteran. The story he has written about his experiences is heart-breaking. The narrator, 21 year old Private Bartle, had literary aspirations in school and received a lot of taunting from his friends, so he decided to prove his manhood by becoming a soldier. This mirrored the author's life who enlisted at age seventeen. At basic training, he meets, the pimple-faced newbie, Murph, whose mother begs Bartle to promise to bring him back from Iraq unharmed.

Of course, no experienced soldier would ever make such a promise but something about the woman reminds the private of his own mother, so he readily agrees. Big mistake. They soon get sent to Al Tafir where a series of bloody battles, including civilian deaths, jade both men. [Read more](#)

Posted by Dory L. on January 20, 2014

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Civil War Fiction



This summer will be the 150 year anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, one of the deadliest

periods of the Civil War. The three days saw record casualties and is also considered one of the turning points of the war. Instead of breaking out a dusty nonfiction tome, consider *The Killer Angels* by Michael Shaara. This fiction book does a good job at adequately describing the events that did occur, but shines at getting into the heads of the major players. We meet Lee, Longstreet and Chamberlain and start to understand their thoughts, positions, opinions and fears as they prepare and head into battle. This is well researched, and really readable. The maps give you a good visual perspective as well.

One of the things I love most about history is not only learning the outcomes and the details of the events that took place, but investigating the other possibilities, thinking about the what-ifs, and figuring out the decisions that went into what really happened. [Read more](#)

Posted by sbowman on April 3, 2013

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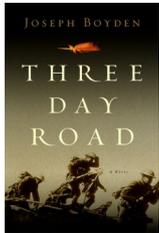
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Three Day Road



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I read a review of *Three Day Road*, Joseph Boyden's first novel of World War I, which mentions that this isn't necessarily an anti-war novel. I had to read the sentence in that review several times to make sure I wasn't misreading or misunderstanding. Does a war novel have to come out and specifically declare a stance?

Really, Boyden includes anti-war elements right up to the breathtaking ending: senseless killings, madness, morphine addiction, shortsighted military leadership, dehumanization, and the day to day terror. The characters in this book do seemingly impossible and horrible things in the name of combat. Is that not stance enough? Is it even important?

It is true that this book is about more than the descent into the hell of trench warfare. It is a really poetic story of Xavier Bird and Elijah Whiskeyjack, Cree Indians who have grown up in Canada near Hudson Bay. They have spent their childhood patiently hunting, skills which serve them well as snipers in some of the worst battles of World War I, including around Vimy Ridge and the Somme. Maybe it needs to be said, but being good at killing moose to survive the winter is different than being good at killing Germans. Xavier and Elijah react differently, but equally destructively, to war. [Read more](#)

Posted by sbowman on December 31, 2012

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War Books



My question of the week - Do women read war novels? I don't mean to ask this in a polarizing and dramatic way, but out of genuine interest.

I recently finished the excellent *Matterhorn* by Karl Marlantes, a novelization about the Vietnam War. Marlantes is a highly decorated Marine who served in Vietnam and this 600 page book was 30 years in the making. The book is technical and almost solely set in Vietnam. There isn't room for families, girlfriends, or real life. This book is intense - filled with racial tensions, horrifying wounds, tigers,

leeches, jungle rot, thirst, hunger, diarrhea, boredom, bad language and inept military structure. I probably lost some of the technicalities of the military maneuvers, but in the end you really care about the characters. At times, reading this was stressful but the pain and longing seems universal and touching. [Read more](#)

Posted by sbowman on March 21, 2012

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[Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State](#)



This six part documentary produced by the BBC looks not only at the horrors that took place in Auschwitz; but at the developments, both political and technological that resulted in what many consider the worst of all the Nazi internment camps -- Auschwitz, along with its immediate aftereffects. I can't say that this documentary was a pleasure to watch but it was educational, important, and horrific. [Read more](#)

Posted by Keith C. on June 26, 2011

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