

A Hundred Million Years and a Day

Jean-Baptiste Andrea

Sam Taylor, Translator

Gallic Books (Jun 16, 2020)

Softcover \$16.95 (176pp)

978-1-910477-83-0

Whatever wilds you conquer or quests you undertake, the most complicated excavations are those that are internal; so a team of adventurers learns in Jean-Baptiste Andrea's breathless and heartbreaking novel, *A Hundred Million Years and a Day*.

Stan—"an angel half the time, a bastard the rest of the time, and the best paleontologist" you'll ever encounter—was done for the moment he dug a trilobite out of a rock at age six. The ancient past became his preferred escape from his volatile present. He left home as soon as he was able, folding into academic circles where he was first a wonder and later a curiosity. And in the waning days of his career, he heard a tantalizing rumor: of dragon bones concealed beneath a glacier.

Unable to resist the possibility of a great discovery, Stan initiated an expedition. He invited along a loyal colleague, Umberto, who supplied a third paleontologist and a mountain guide familiar with the region's temperaments. Together, the foursome climbs into regions hostile to life, holding fast to hope but watching as summer days fade away. Stan, half lost in the pains and injustices of his past, insists that they persist.

Sympathetic as its characters strain for a taste of immortality—some of them more hungry to be memorialized than others—the story is thrilling and wrenching by turns. Stan's forays into his past are softened by his lyrical turns of phrase and his musings on immortality, though the brutality he survived can't be tempered entirely. It's a gift that his final discovery is ambiguous: maybe it's real, or maybe a dream, but at least it brings peace. Tracing a treasure that waits just out of reach, *A Hundred Million Years and a Day* speaks to the adventurers within us all.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May / June 2020)

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