



Borealis

Bill Bennett

BillBenn Books

(363pp)

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Atmospheric suspense, geopolitical stakes, and the untamable forces of nature combine to make Borealis a fascinating eco-thriller.

In Bill Bennett's compelling novel *Borealis*, a relentless detective sets out to uncover buried secrets tied to an oil and gas company.

Following her last mission in Florida, Ava, a detective, travels to Anchorage in search of peace and quiet. Instead, she is pulled into another mystery, "straight into the center of something humming beneath the surface." In her investigation, she partners with Cole, an enigmatic former army officer she meets at an oil summit. Together they unravel a dangerous web of corporate ambition linked to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System—people taking profit-driven actions that threaten fragile ecosystems.

Ava questions the limitations of justice and of moral accountability within systems shaped by power and compromise as she investigates, and Cole's concealed history complicates his ethical decision-making. Still, as Ava and Cole work the case, their personal relationship deepens, taking on a romantic dimension, though this evolution is underdeveloped. Their exchanges gesture to intimacy, but how that reshapes their decision-making is kept vague, resulting in imbalance between the book's thriller and romance elements. Further, the secondary characters are underdeveloped and indistinctive, occupying hazy roles in the narrative.

In contrast, Alaska's wild and unforgiving landscapes are described in vivid detail, capturing the environment's dual beauty and hostility. Eloquent descriptions, as of "the aurora flicker[ing] against the horizon, [its] green ribbons twisting above," flesh out the satisfying backdrop to the book's pulse-pounding action. Still, uncertainty, more so than spectacle, informs the book's progression. Its investigative scenes draw suspense from missing pieces of information, shadow operations, and espionage. The novel further sustains its momentum through careful revelations, balancing action with moments of introspection and oscillating between the known and the unknown, order and chaos, silence and noise, mirroring Ava's internal struggles as she navigates a case where the truth has been obscured on purpose.

While it is centered by a clash between human ambition and a landscape governed by its own relentless rhythms, the central mystery is unresolved in the end. In the place of a clear conclusion are considerations of how institutional priorities marginalize vulnerable communities and environments. Though its premise is intriguing, the novel's underdeveloped elements make it difficult to fully invest in the outcome.

In the riveting thriller *Borealis*, exploited lands resist the incursions of people who abuse their power.

DEFNE TEKIN (March 17, 2026)

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