

Horse Latitudes

Morris Collins

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Its characters trample through lands on the brink of madness in search of something certain; its images are violent, heartbreaking, and starkly real. Morris Collins's *Horse Latitudes* is a historically attuned novel for a world that has lost its way.

Ethan is a photographer who has trained himself not to see every truth. He did not see that his wife, Samantha, was drifting somewhere perilous; he does not see that escaping to Central America, especially to a country always on the cusp of a coup, is not the solution to his regret.

In humid Guatemala, horrors await—including those set into motion by vicious, momentary allies who conspire to steal children in the night. In a border brothel, Ethan encounters Yolanda, who rescues him from death in exchange for a favor, to be fulfilled farther south.

The text highlights the unspeakable cruelties that people visit upon one another: “they want to feel some hurt so much greater than their own. They want something ... they can break, irreparably break, and then walk away from.” Women and children are trafficked, lied to, and violated, all while they hold out for the glittering possibility of a better life over the border. Details here are realistic, and their warnings are somber.

When it comes to Ethan's own story, the strokes are more surrealistic, even imprecise, whorling around concepts like grief and vengeance without landing anywhere concrete. He is resentful of stories of unbearable suffering if it is not of the specific kind that could help him understand Samantha better. His becomes a ragged trek built on broken motivations, whose potentially redemptive acts carry no real possibility of a clean slate.

Stumbling toward nightmare realizations, *Horse Latitudes* is a novel with the edge of the thriller and the bleak rawness of a documentary—feral, needful, and unapologetic about the dark underbellies it reveals.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (January/February 2019)

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