



Jamestown, Alaska

Frank Turner Hollon

Dzanc Books (Jun 7, 2016)

Softcover \$15.95 (216pp)

978-1-938103-50-6

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In Frank Turner Hollon's *Jamestown, Alaska*, a novelist receives a cryptic invitation to become the official historian of a new civilization set up in the northernmost state. Of course, there's a dark side to the whole ordeal, and Hollon relates that story engagingly, with a wry wit and just the right amount of bleak humor.

The protagonist, Aaron Jennings, is a married father in the suburbs, behind schedule on his new book, and living a life of dull routine. The story kicks into gear when he finds an anonymous manifesto on his doorstep that explains the Jamestown civilization's reason for being. Its vision has utopian and dystopian elements, arguing that society is beyond repair, viewing the masses as immoral, and taking an economic view that the elite should not help any beneath them. Soon after, Jennings finds a mysterious man in his home—one of the members of Jamestown's governing committee, offering him the chance to chronicle the experiment.

Using lean prose and his fish-out-of-water protagonist, Hollon makes the experience of going to Jamestown appropriately disorienting. Each member of the committee in charge of the settlement seems to have a hidden agenda. Jennings develops a crush on one of them, while another asks him to share in a scandalous secret. As he spends more time in Alaska, the writer begins to lose touch with his family, and grows paranoid about how his home life related to his being called to Jamestown. He also begins to see how the committee's strict rules for Jamestown citizens' behavior play out when they're not just written in a manifesto. The whole time, he must weigh his feelings and decide whether to commit to a new life in Alaska.

Jamestown, Alaska is fast-paced and effective, blending the absurd and the cruelly twisted aspects of the committee's plan. That the settlement won't work may be predictable, but the challenges Jennings faces provide plenty of unexpected twists.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Fall 2016)

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