

Some Damn Fool Thing

J. William Whitaker

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Some Damn Fool Thing is excellent and nuanced historical fiction.

The first in a planned series, J. William Whitaker's historical novel *Some Damn Fool Thing* explores the historical and social changes and conflicts leading up to World War I. A group of Parisians is at the center of the growing drama, and their actions intercut the greater sweep of history.

The story begins in 1905, and follows through to the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the domino effect of war being declared across Europe. Robert, Thomas, Sarah, and Hervé have stories that interconnect in that period. Through them, a variety of perspectives, including social, cultural, and emotional elements, are given attention.

The characters' lives and jobs, from soldiers to nurses, are inextricably connected to the building conflict, and though they wish to resist the outbreak and spread of the war, they find themselves dangerously caught up in it. Robert, for example, is a retired soldier who attempts to settle into a civilian life before the war pulls him back, and Maria, a nurse, worries about the coming violence, knowing that the damage will be considerable.

The novel's historical portions are generally written matter-of-factly, with information presented for the reader's benefit. More dramatic are the characters' stories, as each reacts to or is impacted by the changes of the greater world. While there is some disconnect between these narration styles, the final product is entertaining and educational, with enough balance to satisfy the audience. The historical timeline ties in well to the narrative, and the story is paced effectively, building to the dawning horror of the war with real tension.

Characters are somewhat one-dimensional in that their characteristics are derived from their roles or jobs, though they are expressive and their interactions are convincing. Bonds of family and friendship tie them together, and they are developed more and more as the novel goes on.

The story moves effectively and easily. Events unfold dramatically and deliberately, and even though the conclusion is certain, the way the story progresses keeps the drama centered and the characters involved. Shifts in perspective help to build greater nuance, providing insights into specific developments or alternative takes on actions.

The book's tone and atmosphere are well established. Tensions between European nations are highlighted, with everything getting worse as the novel progresses. The sense of dread is palpable.

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CJ TRIPLETT (October 17, 2017)

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