



Strawberry Fields

Hilary Plum

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In Hilary Plum's *Strawberry Fields*, myriad memorable protagonists report on tragedies from hotspots around the world with vivid language. Though many of the point-of-view chapters are only loosely connected, they add up to a bleak but well-rendered picture of global destruction.

The novel moves through many of the major crises of the early twenty-first century. Locations include Iraq during the US invasion, New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and Pakistan under constant drone warfare.

The main protagonists are a journalist and a detective investigating the murder of five Iraq War veterans, but their perspectives alternate with plenty of others. By design, the novel descends into a morass of painful situations and helpless observers. Rather than merely investigate the murders, the book uses them as a jumping-off point to explore other ramifications of the same foreign policy that was their root cause.

Few novels feature so many works of journalism cited in the credits. For research, Plum used real reporters' impressions of the crises that her fictional equivalents navigate. Her narrators are outside observers; her lyrical first-person writing is plausible as their work.

One heartbreaking chapter tells of a neglected zoo, the horrible things done there, and the extreme measures required to keep the few starving animals left alive. Another takes the form of a letter to a dead journalist's wife, describing his accidental death from falling into an electrified waterway. Others deal with the shady machinations of a contracting mercenary force or focus on a journalist in a Mexican jail trying to send a message to the outside world.

The subject matter is universally dark, but also very realistic, making *Strawberry Fields* work as a thinly fictionalized version of global chaos.

JEFF FLEISCHER (May/June 2018)

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