

## This Here Is Devil's Work

**Curtis Bradley Vickers**

University of Nevada Press (Feb 23, 2021)

Hardcover \$28.95 (320pp)

978-1-64779-004-2

In Curtis Bradley Vickers's harrowing novel *This Here Is Devil's Work*, two wildland firefighters and a cattle rustler are thrust together when lightning sparks a blaze.

Morgan is a brash but effective member of the Ruby Mountain Hotshots, a firefighting crew populated by the best of the best. He brings his half brother, Jeremy, who's hoping to save money, into the crew. For Jeremy: the money is a means of escape. He hopes to attend auto mechanic training, while Morgan is driven by a paternal connection to provide for his ad hoc family.

In a small town in Montana, Jacklynn's life has involved a series of missteps and bad decisions. She has an estranged daughter and a grandson. She falls under the charm of a mysterious stranger; the two concoct a plan to steal pregnant cows. Morgan, Jeremy, and Jacklynn collide when a wildfire rages across Montana, threatening small towns and livestock.

The characters are driven by the interplay between their desires and needs: Morgan is compelled to risk his half brother's life on the fire line; Jacklynn makes herself overlook her grandson's welfare in the hopes of a payday. All are flawed but endearing, and following as they struggle through their grandiose plans is gripping. In one scene, Jacklynn makes off with a stolen cow, only to be forced to euthanize a mother and calf, risking her job and her life: she can't endure an animal's suffering, not even at her own expense. Such difficulties make Morgan and Jacklynn's narratives compelling and their resolutions heartwrenching, and the book's intense action contributes to this thoughtful reading experience.

In the powerful New Western novel *This Here Is Devil's Work*, emotions propel perceived heroes toward destructive acts.

JOHN M. MURRAY (January / February 2021)

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