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The Coming of the White Wolf Girl, by James Prothero. Reviewed by Jessica Dickinson Goodman.

Jessica Dickinson Goodman

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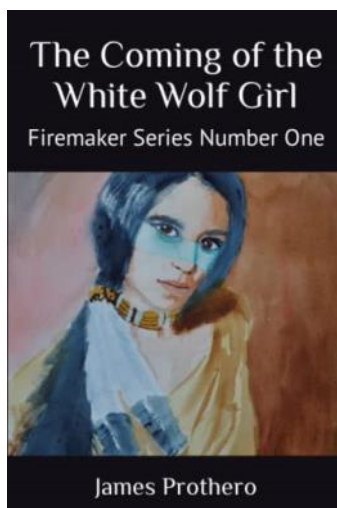
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JAMES PROTHERO. *The Coming of the White Wolf Girl*. FIREMAKER SERIES vol. 1. Blue Iris Books, 2023. 256pp. \$15.00 paperback. Reviewed by Jessica Dickinson Goodman.

If mythopoeic fantasy dwells in the edges of echoes of the past, stone age fantasy lives on in the echoes of echoes. We know so little about the builders of Çatalhöyük, Nabta Playa, Jhusi, Nanzhuangtou and dozens of other neolithic settlements, that when it comes time for an author to spark our imaginations about how they lived and what they saw, we have a much wider range of options than we do when reading stories set in the more knowable 1500s London or 1980s St. Louis.

James Prothero's *The Coming of the White Wolf Girl* blends the realistic trials of a small band of people with an animistic metaphysics, where mammoths can communicate telepathically and some special people can heal with their hands. The author lets us ride alongside the main character, as she goes through name changes, life changes, and changes in her powers. We watch her lead her people – sometimes boldly, sometimes cautiously, sometimes certain of her authority, and sometimes full of doubt – through many of the lands and cultures of a broad, wide world.

The world she journeys through is appropriately familiar-strange. Food I eat weekly suddenly appears under a different name,



rivers I have crossed and mountains I have climbed flow into and out of memory and conversations. I find these light intersections a real joy and one of my favorite details in this piece. They

are spread throughout.

Lovers of the American West might recognize natural features throughout the story, knitting this story into our understandings of the lands we currently inhabit. I felt my heart lighten when the main character finally comes to a mountain of significance to the plot, and I recognized it. If I guessed right, today it's known as Bear's Tipi to citizens of the Arapaho Tribe, Na Kovehe (Bear Lodge) to citizens of the Cheyenne Nations, Bear's House to citizens of the Crow Tribe, Tso-aa (Tree Rock) to citizens of the Kiowa Tribe, and Mato Tipila to citizens of the Lakota Nation. Many non-native people today call it Devil's Tower, Wyoming.

Names have great significance in *The Coming of White Wolf Girl*, with characters and bands of people changing their titles as significant events warp the weave of their lives. The first person, present tense narrator declines to share the names of some characters who have died out of concern it will stop their spirits from completing their journey onwards, but she complicates that stance in a particularly poignant moment in the final chapter in a way that is very human and satisfying.

Readers who are curious about what it takes to survive an ice age or travel extreme distances over land will enjoy the well-wrought practicals in this story. The magic system is satisfyingly progressive and feels thoroughly endemic to the world. Those of us who enjoy the self-referential repetition of oral histories will enjoy the rhythm of the writing, which the micro press publisher has left intact. It fits the in-story way in which the narrative is shared quite well.

Now for the cautions – please skip the next paragraph if you wish to avoid spoilers and content warnings. The neolithic era as told in this story was a tough time. Readers who don't prefer to read rape as a magical motivator or major plot thread should proceed with caution. Those who don't want to read depictions of violent childbirth, child

sickness and death, war, violence against animals, kidnapping, forced marriage, starvation, or elder abuse should also be wary. The main character is often deeply troubled that her experiences of sexual assault make her unfit for leadership, affection, marriage, or love, which might be tough to read for some readers.

The Coming of the White Wolf Girl is written with great love for the places and people it depicts, giving a wide lens and deep sympathy to the desperate choices that made up their days. For readers interested in a non-fiction exploration of similar times and cultures, I cannot recommend Annalee Newitz's *Four Lost Cities* (W. W. Norton, 2022) highly enough. They dive deeply in Çatalhöyük, Pompeii, Angkor, and Cahokia. Only the first city is neolithic, but the doorposts made of skulls and bulls-head children's toys are well worth the purchase price.

