

INVISIBLE PUBLISHING

Trade Paperback

ISBN: 9781988784250

Price: \$19.95

Trim: 5" x 8" / 256 pp

289 Main Street, Suite 1

Picton, ON K0K 2T0

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Distributed to the trade by

Publishers Group Canada/Raincoast

customerservice@raincoast.com



READING GUIDE: Andrew Forbes's *Lands and Forests*

Hello, Readers, and thank you.

I'm grateful that, among all the choices available to you, you've elected to spend some time considering my work. I hope you'll find it worth your while.

Lands and Forests is a work of fiction about fictional people in actual places. The twelve stories in the book vary in length, tone, and subject matter, but are linked by a concern for the natural and psychic places we call home. For the most part the places in the book are in Ontario, but they're also in Arizona and Quebec—but regardless of where you're from and where you're reading, I hope you recognize some aspect of these places. If I've done my job right, you might even find your experiences mirrored in the connections the stories' characters have to the places where they live, get lost, work, love, and are found.

A central preoccupation of mine while writing these stories was the natural world, and our place in it. How it changes us while we are busy changing it. How we negotiate it, the ways in which we accept it, the ways in which we resist it. That could be a fertile topic for you to discuss: how the natural world affects these characters and their stories, and how the characters affect the natural world.

While writing and editing this book, I became drawn to several works in the genre known as climate fiction, or cli-fi, and I believe the imagery and ideas of that genre rubbed off on the stories in *Lands and Forests*. Cli-fi generally takes place in the future, of course, and depicts cataclysm and disaster on a planetary scale. My book doesn't contain those things, but I think it's safe to say that it mirrors cli-fi in other ways. You might try to identify those similarities.

Lastly, my obsession with the short story form continues. As was the case with my first book, *What You Need*, the stories in *Lands and Forests* seek to engage in a dialogue with some of the luminaries of short fiction: Alice Munro, Rick Bass, Lorrie Moore, Lucia Berlin, Richard Ford, and many others. The book also asserts, by virtue of its shape, the distinction between novels and short stories, and reiterates my belief that stories are not merely tiny novels. What, in your mind, is the difference between novels and stories? What do each of these forms do best? What are their weaknesses? Could any of the stories in *Lands and Forests* be expanded into longer works?

I hope this guide proves to be of some use to you, and helps you navigate your way through the stories. Ideally, I'd be present to help answer your questions, but as a backup this isn't bad.

Thanks again for choosing to carefully read *Lands and Forests*. I sincerely appreciate it.

All best,
Andrew Forbes

