

enthus over its 'ample closets.'

Ann Lyon

### SET THE NIGHT ON FIRE

Libby Fischer Hellmann, Allium Press of Chicago, 2010, \$24.99, hb, 360pp, 780984067657; \$14.99, pb, 9780984067657

Lila Hilliard is devastated when a suspicious accident kills her father and her brother. What she doesn't expect is that the person who caused the accident is after her as well. After a few close scrapes, she is saved by a man named Dar, who happens to be an old friend of her father's. Dar, along with Casey Hilliard, was a student activist in the late 1960s, and everyone in their circle of friends shares a secret that someone would like to keep quiet. Lila, unaware of her parents' past, is shocked, but as Dar explains their strong anti-war beliefs, she learns more about her family than she could have imagined.

The thriller (set in the present day) is enjoyable and often exciting, and the 1960s-set backstory is compelling. Dar, Casey, and the other young activists are passionate about their beliefs, and their passion leads to their downfall and disillusionment. Lila finds out that much of what she believed about her parents and her family is wrong, and has to reconcile her newfound knowledge of who she is with her grief over the tragic incidents that have claimed the lives of those closest to her. Some of the plot twists are predictable, but overall, this is an exciting book for readers who enjoy an action-packed thriller mixed with their historical facts.

Nanette Donohue

### STRANGER HERE BELOW

Joyce Hinnefeld, Unbridled, 2010, \$24.95/C\$28.95, hb, 288pp, 9781609530044

This is a novel about friendship, motherhood and community. Amazing Grace Jansen, or Maze, was raised in Appalachia by a single mother who struggled with poverty, just as her mother did before her. Mary Elizabeth Cox, daughter of a southern black preacher, has been raised by a mother with severe emotional scars stemming from traumatic events experienced in childhood. When they meet at Berea College in 1961, it seems, at first glance, that the roommates have little in common upon which to build a friendship. But a shared love of the outdoors, a similar work ethic, and Maze's sheer persistence pays off.

The secondary plot involves Sister Georgia, one of the last Shakers left at the tiny community near Harrodsburg, Kentucky. Before joining the Shakers, Georginea Ward had been a teacher at Berea, but a doomed romance led her down a different path. She takes Maze under her wing at a time when she most needs a guiding hand, and that guidance leads to a surprising outcome.

I enjoyed the how the author used landscape as metaphor, and how she gave voice to her characters, particularly Maze. While I usually enjoy non-linear storytelling, especially in multigenerational stories when it is often an effective method for joining and comparing separate storylines, in this instance, the

jumping back and forth threw me off.

Alice Logsdon

### HARBOUR

Paul House, Dragon International Independent Arts, 2009, £11.99, pb, 387pp, 9781907386022

As war breaks out in Europe, and Japanese troops advance towards Hong Kong, Molly Russell, daughter of the wheelchair-bound Willard, and her Chinese mother are travelling to Nanchang, an important logistical centre for the Chinese Nationalists, when the train they are on is sabotaged. They are forced to walk towards Hong Kong, but coolies have to carry her mother, who is dying of cholera. Upon arrival they are refused entry, but when Willard hears of their plight, he goes to meet them and pays an exorbitant fee to have them allowed in. When informed of a woman's death, he misunderstands what he was told and his response causes Molly, who in turn misinterprets his action as callousness, to dissociate herself from him. Shortly afterwards, Molly, who can pass for Chinese, is chosen to be the companion to Tung Nien, the beautiful new bride of Chien Liew, a wealthy, elderly Triad leader, who manipulates events from behind the scenes and is secretly dealing with the Japanese invasion forces.

Tung Nien and Molly are invited into the society of the Westerners, who are aware of the approaching invasion but continue their lives

in a cultural inertia. One of them falls in love with Tung Nien, and they begin a clandestine relationship whilst the lives of those around them fragment as the Japanese army draws nearer. Molly in turn is in love with Wu Tang, and they both face an uncertain future in the coming conflict.

House interweaves the impact of a changing society in this meticulously-researched novel, and captures the strengths and flaws of the Chinese and European cultures and characters with immense skill.

Janet Williamson

### THE HAT

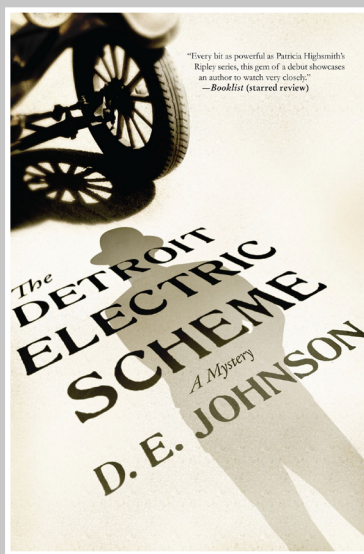
Babette Hughes, Sunstone, 2011, \$26.95, hb, 188pp, 9780865347847

The murder of a bootlegger occurs in the first few pages of the book. Then, in a flashback, we meet Kate Brady, an 18-year-old girl who has just lost her job at Shapiro's bakery, taking away her hopes of attending college in the fall. Now jobless in the depths of the Great Depression, she has little hope of escaping her alcoholic mother and her squalid Cleveland neighborhood, until a chance meeting with a rich dreamboat named Ben Gold. She is so taken with him that she scarcely sees the hints of a darker side – until, that is, after their marriage. Then she begins to notice things, like the hit man constantly at her husband's side, and the late night disappearances. But she also notices



### THE DETROIT ELECTRIC SCHEME

D. E. Johnson, Minotaur, 2010, \$24.99, hb, 312pp, 9780312644567



### EDITORS' CHOICE

Disguised by its uninspiring cover and prosaic title as niche non-fiction, *The Detroit Electric Scheme* is in reality an action-packed historical mystery propelled forward by intriguing characters, thought-provoking moral conundrums, and a gripping plot. Detroit in 1910 is "vibrant, powerful, and full of optimism." The automobile industry is in its infancy, and businessmen, inventors, politicians, and union bosses are all jockeying for positions of dominance. Head-cracking is a regular occurrence, but it could just as easily be the police wielding the clubs as the strike-breakers or criminals.

Will Anderson, 22-year-old son of the owner of Detroit Electric, the leading electric automobile manufacturer, is jolted from his drunken haze when he finds the crushed body of his one-time friend, John Cooper, in a hydraulic press in his father's factory. The gruesome murder scene is traumatic enough, but it is the realization that he will certainly be the prime suspect that causes Will to panic and flee. Soon he is charged with murder. Desperate to protect those he

loves, as well as to avoid spending the rest of his life in jail, Will launches his own investigation. Will Anderson is as flawed as the city he inhabits, and his stumbling missteps soon lead him into the seamy underworld of Vito Adamo, Detroit's first crime boss. If he is to survive long enough to prove his innocence, Will must first confront the addictions and regrets that have already imprisoned him in a life of mediocrity.

Johnson is so skilled a writer that the race for supremacy between the manufacturers of electric and gasoline-powered automobiles is every bit as exciting as the chase through the streets of Detroit to find a ruthless killer. This remarkable debut novel will give you a thrilling ride, and leave you wanting more.

Nancy J. Attwell