



Smoke River

Krista Foss

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An extraordinarily accomplished debut, *Smoke River* follows two families on different sides of a crisis with deep roots in history and territory through one fateful summer. For readers of Lori Lansens, Joseph Boyden, and John Bemrose's *The Island Walkers*.

After a proposed subdivision becomes the site of a Mohawk protest -- the land, which has long formed a kind of neutral border between a reserve and the neighbouring town, is contested -- tensions escalate through three sweltering summer months, exposing old wounds, as well as forging new and sometimes surprising connections.

This compelling contemporary story is told in the voices of several vivid, unforgettable characters, from the restless young Mohawk woman dreaming of adventure and fame in the wider world; to the successful businessman who has made good use of his position between two communities, and who harbours a surprisingly tender secret; to the high school hero whose inner life would shock his admirers, especially his ambitious mother; and to the unexpected lovers, who must weigh happiness against history and fierce pride.

Smoke River is wise and tender, fearless and often very funny. It heralds the arrival of a vibrant, original, and intrepid new voice in Canadian literature.

Smoke River Details

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Author : Krista Foss

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From Reader Review *Smoke River* for online ebook

Gayle Parker says

Krista Foss's, a resident of Hamilton Ontario, debut novel. It is an important fictional account of a land claim protest which depicts the systemic and individual discrimination in our current age. It follows several individuals both native and non-native underscoring themes of ambition, love, regret, race, ancestry, economics and tobacco farming. The only criticism is that the ending felt forced.

Kireja says

Krista Foss' multi-narrative, *Smoke River*, evokes memories of the 2006 Grand River land dispute in Caledonia, Oka and Kanehsatake, Ipperwash, Duffey Lake and other long-running land disputes. (A list of current land claims in *Ontario* can be found at <https://www.ontario.ca/page/current-l...>). This book is the perfect book to read in honour of Canada 150 so that we can understand and acknowledge the historical and ongoing abhorrent treatment of Canada's Indigenous Peoples. Foss' narrative highlights the trauma of residential schools, status and non-status designations (particularly in relation to women), land and treaty rights, violence against Indigenous women and the limits placed on Indigenous self-determination. Foss also addresses larger themes such as marginalization, isolation, and identity that both her Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters face. The only criticisms that I have is that at times it was difficult to keep track of all the characters since their stories are interspersed throughout the novel and some characters didn't get endings that resolved their story lines.

Selina Young says

This is a book for all to read. The themes it addresses - racism, violence against Aboriginal women, rural issues and more - are important for all of us to talk about. This is a book that could break barriers.

Alexis says

Why in the world is this book not getting more press? I thought it was great. It's a novel that told the story of a small town. One portion of the town wants to put a development on native land, and the natives erect a blockade. Conflict ensues. The writing is really good and the characters are fully developed. The writer takes the reader into the heads of many characters, so we can see the situation from a variety of angles. I loved the exploration and interplay between the racial issues and the characters. I felt the Mohawk characters were solidly developed, and the tension in the book was deftly handled.

I really enjoyed this book and felt that it was a very strong debut. I wish it was getting more attention!

Cody Leet says

This book was absolutely terrible. There is no story line whatsoever, and it is so unimportant. This book constantly jumps characters, point of views, settings and information, and this doesn't even happen between chapters, it happens during one chapter. Also, the chapters bleed into each other, while at the same time being contradictory towards the previous chapter. Keep in mind that this is my honest opinion, however this was extremely hard to follow. Upon trying to reflect on this book, I was unable to retain any information whatsoever. In addition to this, it's clear that the author's main focus were the sexual parts and the drug/tobacco related parts as she puts so much detail into said parts. While reading, I felt as if I was dyslexic. I don't want to offend anyone, however this is how I felt.

Jack Heath says

Synopsis: tensions arise between the aboriginal community and a neighbouring town regarding some land and a proposed subdivision.

John Corr says

Krista Foss was trained as a journalist as well as a creative writer and she combines those talents in this novel. Foss takes an incredibly volatile socio-political reality--lands claims tensions between First Nations people and a small-town, white, settler community--and represents it with nuance and grace. You do not come away from this thinking she has any agenda other than to help different kinds of people understand each other a little bit better. Smoke River delivers on this promise. Even if you're unfamiliar with lands claims conflicts, you'll come away understanding multiple perspectives and caring about those perspectives in new ways.

At the same time, if all of that sounds a "too political" for you, you can always just sit back and enjoy the love story, suspense, and the range of characters that animate this novel. At times sweet and at times painful, this story will stay with you.

Rebecca says

The writing was beautiful. Foss is clearly a talented writer. This type of book hasn't been my style of late, so it was a nice peek into reality after several months of fantasy and autobiographies. Keep in mind there are several serious issues addressed, this is not a beach read, and you will feel depressed at most moments. There is also some sexual violence, just to warn those who have trouble reading those scenes. The visuals created are stunning, and for those of us who grew up in the country, it's somewhat nostalgic. Great debut novel.

J.H. Gordon says

This novel is an exercise in empathy. Krista Foss has taken a prominent (and all too common) news headline and created a complex and deeply human story around it. The plot centres on a land dispute between a land developer and a First Nations community but Foss doesn't take a side. She writes a third person omniscient narrative that tells the story from multiple points-of-view including the developer, First Nations protestors, the town Mayor, a tobacco farmer, local teenagers, and others. With all these voices running through the text it is a credit to the writing that it never becomes overwhelming or confusing. Every character is well developed and feel entirely real, and the prose is gorgeous and incredibly sensual. The writing makes *Smoke River* a pleasure to read while the moral questions raised by the author will leave to you thinking about this timely issue long after you close the book.

Andrew Baulcomb says

Smoke River is a smouldering debut from Hamilton-based author Krista Foss. A complex and riveting novel that explores the intersection between multiple characters, communities and histories, Foss has produced an instant classic in the gripping tradition of Southern Ontario Gothic literature.

A slow burn that never really dies down, *Smoke River* is a beautiful and, at times, sinister novel that offers equal amounts of passion and tension. Foss exposes us to the light and dark side of each character, and masterfully introduces a number of different voices while building a strong, coherent narrative. In terms of the book's setting, the rural townships between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie have long been rife with cultural conflict. Foss manages to distill hundreds of years of local history without overwhelming the reader or losing sight of the main plot — a remarkable feat.

Expect to find this book on several best-of lists at the end of the year.

Kat says

Really interesting take on the Caledonia land dispute. Lots of characters (maybe a few too many?) but I loved the language and really found it to be a good read.

Brian Ross says

One of the best novels I've read in quite some time.

The initial premise is clearly inspired by a highway blockade resulting from a dispute over a tract of land being developed outside of Caledonia, Ontario a few years ago. Emerging from this we see the politics and clash of values both between and within the indigenous and non-native communities, and how one hot summer this all blows up. But there is a second major plot point: a brutal crime that is not directly connected to the blockade, but reflects the same spirit.

These two events entwine the major native and non-native characters of the book, each with a rich backstory (often intersecting with that of other characters). The story is told from the perspective of several characters, switching as we go along. It is deeply personal - we come to understand how each character has been or is

being shaped by their origins, love and loss and hope, and especially memory. Relationships are the core of the story - between lovers, family, neighbours - between what we want to believe and what really is - between our ideals and convictions and the consequences of acting upon them - between reason and passion - between ``loyalty`` and justice. While racism pervades the novel, the author avoids making cartoons of the characters (with one exception I think: Gordo); her telling is steeped in empathy.

I found this to be a suspenseful page-turner, even though it is more character than plot-driven. Foss writes lyrical descriptions, bang-on character sketches, and crisp plotting. You can feel the menace growing as you go. Best of all, I think, is that it explores complex and difficult human relations with respect and empathy, a wonderful tonic to the easy-out bumper-sticker beliefs and explanations and demands for action that bedevil our modern life.

Highly recommended.

❁ **Susan G says**

<https://ayearofbooksblog.com/2016/09/...>

After attending an inspiring workshop by Krista Foss, Writer in Residence at the County of Brant Library (Paris), I was interested to read her sentinel novel, *Smoke River*. Foss lives in Hamilton, Ontario and is a former journalist who has published multiple short stories and essays. She is an energizing presenter who is excited to share her craft and inspire others with their writing.

Smoke River begins when a blockade is built by indigenous protestors at the site of a proposed subdivision. The highway has been blocked and the development has been halted. A local family has a significant financial stake in the development and a Mohawk family is committed to protecting the land which is between the reserve and a neighbouring town. As tensions escalate, a violent crime occurs that impacts both groups as they fail to negotiate a solution.

The story touches on historical land claim issues and provides the reader with additional insight into the issues surrounding indigenous families such as the aftermath of residential schools. Growing up close to the Six Nations reserve, the descriptions of the treatment of indigenous students at school cause me to pause and think of situations that I had witnessed in high school. The story addresses a sensitive issue that continues to be in the news including land claims and violence to indigenous women.

Foss was the guest speaker at the Paris Lectures (by Jane and Jury) in August and spoke of creativity in relation to settings. Although this novel seems reminiscent of the Caledonia land dispute of 2009, Foss shared that “any place closely observed is every place” and that her novel is actually a compilation of issues that have taken place across Canada with the “same pattern and same template”. Reading the story with recognizable events and geography provides familiarity for the reader as they absorb the details of this narrative.

Smoke River had an interesting cast of well-developed characters who were dealing with their own internal and family struggles juxtaposed with the land claims issue. I enjoyed the tension but similar to the real land claims issues, missed a resolution. The novel helps readers to understand both sides of issues and I look forward to the next novel by Krista Foss as well as the next workshop in her writing series.

Sherry Monger says

Smoke River is the exploration of a tense Caledonia-style conflict in a small community. The barricades are up as the local Mohawk band protests the building of a subdivision on disputed land. The characters all have a vested interest in the outcome and Foss deftly inserts the reader into the tumultuous lives of all the protagonists. The many wounds and misunderstandings of their personal lives mirror the larger conflicts between neighbours and cultures at the barricades.

Bev Trojnar says

This is a powerful novel. A real page turner.
