



## The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness

*Rick Bass*

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GQ called the three short novels in this collection "wondrous." A woman returns to live on her family's west Texas ranch . . . a man tracks his wife through a winter wilderness . . . an ancient ocean buried in the foothills of the Appalachians becomes a battleground for a young wildcat oilman and his aging mentor. Here is Bass at his magical, passionate, and lyrical best.

## **The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness Details**

Date : Published September 30th 1998 by Mariner Books (first published 1997)

ISBN : 9780395924754

Author : Rick Bass

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## From Reader Review The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness for online ebook

### T.Y. Lee says

This author took me by surprise. I became his characters. Their stories were my stories. I could smell the air, the trees... I could count all the stars. Rick Bass found a way to take me there (any "there") and wrap me in his subtle and deliberate choice of words. And when I finished reading, I was strangely uncomfortable.

He signed my book. Be jealous. =)

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### Scott says

All three of the novellas in this book are quite good, but the third one really stands out. On the surface, it's the story of a woman growing up on a ranch in Texas. But really it's a an homage to a beloved and beautiful place. Bass does a wonderful job of bringing the ranch--its history, plants, animals, and more--to life through the eyes of the narrator. A lot of the fiction I read is about places more than people, but I can think of few books that brought a place to life better than this one.

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### Marlène says

Difficile d'écrire sur l'expérience de la Nature à travers ces 3 nouvelles sublimes de Rick Bass.

Toutes différentes. Des tons, époques et lieux différents. Le trappeur à la poursuite de sa femme qui reste juste hors de sa portée ; le jeune loup, fraîchement libéré du grand patron pétrolier, mettant à jour des nappes de pétrole là où son mentor échouait ; et la nouvelle dont le recueil porte le nom, cycle de vie d'une famille et de "sa" terre.

Trois déclarations d'amour à la Nature, personnage central aux multiples visages. La première dans la folie de l'isolement et des grands espaces. La seconde dans l'imagination du passé de la région, comme un rêve doux et paisible de mer disparue bien avant le passage destructeur de l'homme. Et la dernière, la plus vive, la plus belle et aussi la plus mélancolique, dans l'apprentissage des rythmes et des cycles de vie de l'homme et de la nature, dans l'émerveillement perpétuel face à une nature qui semble peu à peu disparaître, avec chaque génération, mais survivra à la narratrice, dernière gardienne de ce temple.

Chaque nouvelle a un impact différent. Les deux premières semblent au premier abord plus froides, la dernière plus intense. Rick Bass travaille lentement son lecteur et laisse la poésie de sa plume s'immiscer pour vous hanter longtemps après que vous ayez doucement reposé le recueil.

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### Melanie says

Original review

'The Myth of Bears' and 'Where The Sea Used to Be' - two novellas unlike any I've read. The first: a fight for territory, possession & freedom. The prose is heady, primal and disquieting.

In the second, (my personal favourite), Wallis, an oilman, is in competition with the richest man in Mississippi. Wallis is like the silence after a door slams, or the echo, he's barely present, there is so much space around him. He decides he might like to fall in love. Not with the girl with sun in her hair, but with the brave, shark-ruled sea that existed millions of years ago:

*'It seemed that every day he could see the old beach more and more clearly: where the dunes were, which would hold oil and which wouldn't, long after they had been buried and forgotten: what the waves had looked like, what the view down the beach had been - the long, straight stretches, and too, the bends, and deep parts offshore...He was the only inhabitant in that world, and it was a beach before men, and he liked it: he felt...loved. As if the beach had chosen him, for its loneliness. How could he drill a dry hole, when he knew the old empty beach so well?'.*

In the third novella, the title story, a loved one is planted in the earth to grow again into freedom and strength. She feeds her family and is remembered through the land, the animals, her children. The prose is as stunning as the imagery. I can see why a lot of people favour this one, but for me, the story of the oilman and his empty beach ..that one just makes me so damn wistful.

Re-read October 2012

This time 'Myth' & 'Where the Sea' got me on a whole other level. In this reading, Judith's liberation is perfectly free without compromise and the burden of regret. I know those things are there in the story, but because I needed it, I could just centre on that good free run of hers, and on those deer moments of the cedar jungle.

With 'Where the Sea', I found myself without the dream, but with a new appreciation for Wallis's balance sheet -

'He was his own man, belonged to no one: he had never drilled a dry hole, and he had saved a dog from being killed. There was a balance sheet, and as long as one did not go below zero, it seemed a victory: like continuous, enduring victory.'

The last novella and title story I admit I skipped. Another time. even beautifully portrayed grief, is still grief.

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### **Judy says**

Why didn't I know about Rick Bass. Exceptional prose. Three novellas. Extraordinary.

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### **Virginia Moss says**

I really enjoyed this book of short stories. The one story about Texas and how our world is changing really hit home with me. I'm seeing it in my lifetime and it makes me feel sad for future generations.

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### **William says**

'The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness' is probably the best short story (novella, in truth) I've ever read. Everything is magically brought to life and quite evocative. Grandfather is hilarious (I laughed as well when the professor was brought out; so out of place) and I like how jarring his personality was when not filtered by Anne's memories.

The other two stories were great as well, although 'Where The Sea Used to Be' seems oddly abrupt as if there should be more to it.

All in all this was a fantastic book and is highly recommended.

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### **Kirk Smith says**

Meh. Sometimes "magical" is not credible.

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### **Kelly says**

I don't really enjoy the author's style of writing. It jumps around a lot, and if you don't have experience in the events happening, then it can be hard to follow. The third novella was the best. I didn't like the first two.

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### **Christine says**

I need some out of doors, natural world contemplative, wilderness and universe glorifying reading right now. It's about that time. When the realization of this habitual yearning finally dawns on me, the first book I always reach for is Rick Bass's collection of three novellas, *The Sky, The Stars, The Wilderness*. The Texas-born and Montana Yaak Valley-dwelling author excels in the short form of literature. And he is one of the few American writers who can consistently and seamlessly marry his deep adoration for the wilderness with the fictional tales he puts on page.

The ethereal yet realistic stories that comprise this collection are all rooted firmly in the land. And a deep respect and awe for how that land which his characters inhabit comes to inhabits them as they pass through on the eye blink-quick trajectories of their lives. Bass's characters find themselves altered by the rocks, rivers, meadows, and trees that they so naively believed they had total dominion over.

In the first tale, a desperate man chases his resourceful, quick-witted wife through the winter-heavy foothills of the north country. She lures and thwarts his progress over and over, until it is uncertain who is attempting to ensnare whom. The second story centers around a young and brash oil surveyor in flight above the Appalachians and the site of the ancient sea that formed them so long ago. The author's reverence for the natural world is clearly spoken through the ruminations and words of a childless woman returning to the vast tract of west Texas land on which she was raised in the final story. She is the last of her family left alive to

keep claim of this ranch that has been their's since before Texas became a state. And she takes stock of and wonders at the wild terrain that will surely outlive her.

These men and women again and again discover their existences bumping up against the inevitable mortality that waits for all. Because what is left behind when we die but the land? No matter how drastically we alter the landscape, or however long we believe we have ownership of those rocks and trees, they will replenish, thrive even, long beyond the brief specks of our lives by millennia.

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### **Kevin says**

I've decided I need to pay more attention to the order in which I read books. To move from one to another with equal strides, not having to over stretch between genres or styles. I recently devoured Patrick DeWitt's *Sisters Brothers*; dazzled by his witty dialogue and cool characters.

Then I turned to this. I was initially underwhelmed; the first novella with its free-flowing prose and circular themes, subsiding then resurfacing, left me unmoved. Then came *Where the Sea Used To Be*, and I slowly became attuned to the writers prose. The passages about seabeds becoming mountains then seas again over billions of years, and how no living creature, man nor beast would have been around to walk those shorelines, neither first nor second time around. These were the lines that dragged me in, led me from the clamour of the modern consumerist world, and reached me on a deeper almost spiritual level.

Come the title story, I was fully succumbing to the meditative power and wisdom of this heartfelt prose, overwhelmed by its moving naturalistic beauty.

Rick Bass is an author who creeps up on you and catches you unawares. He writes about the things that matter in this world, the natural things that bind us all together, that bind us to every generation from the past and from the future. The things that were important before there was anything else, and will still be important after everything else has vanished. Bass rewards his readers with not just the ability to see the bigger picture, but with the serenity to embrace it.

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### **Christopher says**

There are some extremely rare books that are great for the way they can change the way you think, change *who you are*. And then there are books, rare more, that don't change you but instead make you understand who you *already* are, but just never saw so clearly until you've read the book and said "Yes! Yes, that is exactly what I mean, exactly what I've *felt* all along." Often, books like these are written by philosophers or mystics. Recently for me, Simone Weil played that comforting role when I read "Waiting for God." Rick Bass has pulled up a chair beside her.

I don't know anything about Bass and I'm not sure if this will be my favorite book by him - it's the first I've read, and only the first of many more I now plan to read - but it's not going to leave my thoughts for a long time. The masculine naturalism that Bass employs is like nothing I've ever read. The works of other "naturalist" writers, like London or Crane, are imbued with a deism that though beautiful can be devastatingly lonely. Man, physically ill-equipped, in a brutal and disinterested world in which nature is to be fought against. The only "miracle" existent in their works is that man is somehow still able to survive in it. Bass utterly dismisses that idea and places man in his proper place, as not only *part* of it but ultimately as

a creature responsible for it. He finds real *value* in humanity, respectfully through his history, traditions, and ceremonies but also especially through his relationships, with both his family and with the land. He doesn't identify man as a separate and destructive force on the earth despite the mistakes he commits but if it appears that way it is only because he's lost and forgotten his proper place.

Perhaps Bass's views have evolved since he wrote these powerful three short stories almost twenty years ago and perhaps my reading of him is naïve, however, this is a wonderful and enlightening book, arranged masterfully to build the landscape of the wilderness we've come out of and the wilderness we are just now entering.

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### **Steven Gilbert says**

How in all of my years, the works of Rick Bass have managed to elude me, I'll never know. But I'm fortunate that his writing is, as the blurb on the cover suggests, timeless. And also lyrical, poetic, thoughtful, passionate, powerful, natural, extraordinary....

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### **Jamie says**

Rule #1, if you're going to write a book for me to read, take all the guesswork out of it, eliminate all chances otherwise, name it "The Sky, The Stars, The Wilderness."

A few years ago I unearthed *The Watch* in the bargain bin of the local used bookstore. Rick Bass I'd never heard of, but it was short stories, it was the south and west, and Clyde Edgerton (I had never read him, but he's our local Durham author) said "There is enough energy in this book to shake a house." Well, okay then. I read "Mississippi" standing in front of the shelf. That was all I needed to know, I was sold. It cost me \$1.

It also started the treasure hunt. Where else I could dig up Rick Bass, who else knew his name. Bargain shelves, pocket change. Funny little looks to mention him in the same sentence as any of the greats. No one caught on, no one knew the secret. \$3 said the tag on this one, but the big box chain was belly-up and the girl at the checkout shrugged, rang it up for a buck.

Which, just—it undermines the whole system, this. Over and over and over. What's the point of wealth if this is the kind of stuff you get for nothing.

Also, what I said before, how maybe the only boy I could fall for has these books faded and dog-eared in the passenger seat: I'm sticking to that story.

*First reviewed June 2011*

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*May 2012:*

That one book you could put in someone's hands to explain down to the core some fundamental part of who you are? This is mine.

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*February 2013:*

Re-read this (of course) after reading the book. I'm so glad there's hundreds more pages about Wallis. I will read any number of hundreds of pages about Wallis. Wallis might just be the voice in my head.

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### **Diana says**

In this collection, Rick Bass explores the relationships between humans, animals, and the natural world, and the way time threads its way through all these lives and binds them, indelibly.

He interlinks warmth, discovery, and complexity with a slow and steady progression that feels infused with reverence and magic. Mostly I'm describing the story "The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness," but these qualities are also applicable to the others.

It's impossible for me to do his writing justice. If you liked these stories, I highly recommend *The Lives of Rocks* and *The Hermit's Story*.

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