



The Parrot Trainer

Swain Wolfe

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At the center of this beguiling novel of the Southwest is an odd romantic triangle—an archaeologist, a former pot thief and art dealer, and a sassy spirit.

Jack, who had been a prominent art dealer and collector, finds a sketch of a parrot trainer from an ancient, Indian Mimbres bowl along with a map to a cliff dwelling, at the scene of a fatal accident. He is fascinated by the image of a parrot trainer and her haunting gesture. Obsessed, he finds the bowl and is stung by something venomous as he descends the cliff. He manages to drive home in spite of his violent reaction to the venom. There, to his confusion, Willow, the Parrot Trainer, comes alive and begs him to free her spirit from the bowl. Jack is certain she is an hallucination, a product of his own mind.

Lucy, an archaeologist from the east, is in New Mexico to give a speech at a convention when she receives a call from Philip, a renowned archaeologist, her mentor and lover. Philip has discovered that a secret DNA test at Berkeley has identified a caucasoidal specimen from a 15,000-year-old body found in a glacier in Alaska and that the sample was sent by a Jack Miller in Silverado. This significant find could revive his waning celebrity. Philip asks Lucy to find Miller and get him to reveal the location of the man in the glacier.

After Lucy's speech, she has a run-in with Henri, a pixieish deconstructionist, who is the subject of a documentary by edgy Anita and her wildman/cameraman Billy. When Anita and Billy learn of Lucy's plan to go to Silverado, they offer to take her so they can film the fireworks between Lucy and Henri. The drive from Albuquerque to Silverado turns into an antic—and sometimes violent—road trip, as they clash with each other and provoke the locals.

Tweaking knee-jerk political correctness and academia, Swain Wolfe provides a rich archaeological and anthropological background that deals with some of the fields' most controversial issues. Witty, sexy, and packed with local color, this is a novel of ideas with the additional appeal of enchanting magic realism, high adventure, and a tender love story.

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Rose Nguyen:

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