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Amanda MacNaughton

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## Reading in Winter

Winter has arrived.

I know the calendar says winter doesn't begin until December 21, but I've never put much stock in that. Our farming season is over, our house is stuffed with storage crops like onions, potatoes, and winter squash, and as I write this, I can look out my window, through the leafless rosebushes dotted with frozen red rose hips, into a beautiful, stark landscape beneath a silver sky with a foot of snow covering the ground.

On Thursday, a storm blew in from the north and west. By the time I drove to work in the afternoon, Sisters was pretty well buried. Sidewalks that hadn't been shoveled were mid-calf deep in moist, heavy snow. This included our sidewalk, as last spring, Brad, the bookstore owner, decided both our snow shovels would feel more comfortable in his garage at home than at the store. He undoubtedly intended to return at least one of them before winter, but winter came suddenly.

Sue and I borrowed a snow shovel from a neighboring business and cleared the sidewalk in front of the store, but it didn't matter, as Sisters was pretty much a ghost town. No one wanted to poke their noses outside, not even to get a good book to read by the fire. I stayed until about 4:00. We'd seen five customers during the entire day, two of whom only wanted newspapers. A quiet pattering noise outside that at first seemed innocuous, even pleasant, turned sinister when I poked my head out and encountered freezing rain. That's when I decided to close the store early, for only the second or third time in my eight years at Paulina Springs Books.

In general, I really don't mind winter. In fact, there are a lot of things I enjoy about the season. One of them is having ample time to read. The dark, cold evenings are a perfect opportunity to settle down with a stack of books.

I would be the last person to pretend that reading always keeps the cabin fever away. During my childhood, my family lived in a rural part of eastern Oregon with no electricity. This severely limited our winter entertainment options. You can read in my father's book, *Somewhere in an Oregon Valley*, how resourceful and ingenious we were, how we spent the

winter evenings in creative pursuits and deep philosophical discussions, or tucked into enriching books. We did those things, but there were nights when, after yet another game squinting at the Uno cards to try to distinguish blue from green by kerosene lamplight, we all gave up and sat around staring at the walls and desperately wishing we could watch a movie.

My life now isn't radically different from my childhood. I'm still a rural peasant in a tiny, non-standard house with a wood stove that must be fed to keep out the cold. But my husband and I do have electricity, and we've discovered we can watch movies on my laptop. The last few nights, old *Northern Exposure* episodes have provided lots of amusement, while before that, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* made us laugh and *El Norte* made us cry. Still, our most common form of indoor entertainment is reading.

Right now, Brian is reading Craig Johnson's *A Serpent's Tooth*. He's read most of the Walt Longmire books. I think I'd enjoy them if I read them, but so far, I enjoy him telling me about them even more.

I just finished re-reading *The Dark is Rising* by Susan Cooper. I read this sequence as a child and was drawn in by how chock-full of Celtic and British mythology the books are. It's a great series for winter, magical, somber, and a bit creepy. The second book takes place in midwinter, with snow and cold playing a major part in the story.

I'm about a third of the way through Michael Faber's new novel, *The Book of Strange New Things*. I started looking at this book at work, while eating lunch. It's a rare book that can make me oblivious to my constant "on-duty" feeling while in the bookstore, even on breaks. This story about a missionary who travels to another planet to minister to the natives, leaving his beloved wife at home on an Earth increasingly falling apart, is like nothing I've ever read, though it does recall echoes of Mary Doria Russell's excellent duo *The Sparrow* and *Children of God*. All these novels do what I think science fiction was made to do: they use the future and other planets as a theater for issues of our own time and our own planet.

My reading list is probably longer than the winter, so I'll just mention a couple of enticingly wintry titles. An advance reader of Sarah Addison Allen's upcoming book *First Frost* waits on my bookshelf. And this winter, I finally want to read Eowyn Ivey's *The Snow Child* (yes, I'm late

to the party). That's just the tip of the iceberg! What's on your winter reading list?

*Amanda MacNaughton is a bookseller at Paulina Springs Books in Sisters and Redmond, Oregon. She doesn't mind being snowed in once in a while, but not for too long. She doesn't mind driving to work in the snow, as long as other drivers behave themselves. And she doesn't mind getting up at 4 a.m. to feed the wood stove, as long as her husband does it.*