

AUGUST IN THE DOG MOON

by

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**DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS**

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The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by student Desmond Fuller, and they evaluated the student's presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the following people who supported me in my academic and creative pursuits. My parents, who always encouraged and allowed space for my interests and curiosity to grow. Tim Schell, for the first workshop and following years of support and encouragement. David Ciminello, for the workshops I needed to get my writing back on its feet, and for the sparkle in his eye. All of my kind, insightful, and caring professors in the Boise State MFA program for everything they taught me about writing and otherwise: Brady Udall, Emily Ruskovich, Nicole Cullen, Mary Lowry, and Mitch Wieland; thank you all for giving me the opportunity to write and learn. And finally, to Lena Walker for being the reason I applied to graduate school in the first place, for being the responsible inspiration for all the positive growth in who I am.

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Though not cited directly, the following texts were helpful in conducting research on wilderness survival and Northwest history. *Ghost Towns of the Northwest*, by Norman D. Weis, and *How to Stay Alive in the Woods; a complete guide to food, shelter, and self-preservation...anywhere*, by Bradford Angier.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of a novel in progress. *August in the Dog Moon* depicts a story about the strange, beautiful, and frightening things we find while exploring the liminal perspective in wild and abandoned places.

In constructing a long-form narrative, this thesis attempts to demonstrate the interworking of multiple narrators through a close third-person narration shared between three primary characters, two supporting characters, transcriptions of found recordings, and several chapters from an omniscient perspective. The intention being to explore the narrative of place through various perspectives and experiences. The accumulating effect being one of panoramic storytelling, increased instances of dramatic irony, and a wholistic proposal for empathy from the reader for all the presented characters.

This multi-perspective coming-of-age novel follows three high-schoolers as they navigate frustrations of youth, broken homes, and secrets in their small Oregon town. When a car accident strands them far from home in the remote Oregon forest, they forge bonds of friendship in the face of surviving in the wilderness together. It is an exploration of the various exterior forces that influence life growing up in a small town in the cascade region of the Pacific Northwest, and how the interior reactions of a young person clash with and negotiate those forces. With elements that draw from works such as of Bud Smith's *Teenager*, Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, and Jean Craighead George's *My Side of The Mountain*, *August in the Dog Moon* strives to present a Northwestern Gothic of modern youth in a particular place and time.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This thesis consists of two thirds of a novel draft. It was developed over the course of my time in the Creative Writing program at Boise State. An initial draft emerged from Brady Udall's Form and Theory of Fiction class where we studied long-form narrative and outlined our own novels. In an independent study with Professor Udall the following fall semester, I wrote the first hundred pages of a second draft which I ultimately discarded. In a second form and theory class with Mary Lowry, I drafted a new outline of the novel and began anew drafting and workshopping the pages that would ultimately become my thesis document.

As stated in my abstract, the primary goals and concerns of this novel are to explore a narrative from multiple points of view. With three primary narrators and four supporting narrators, the novel examines what place means in the context of the rural Pacific Northwest. Crucial themes include the socio-economic dynamics of a small-town high school, how poverty shapes our choices, and the moment when childhood is ending, and the rest of our lives lie open and indifferent to our pasts. I worked closely with Professor Udall to achieve this through clarifying and perfecting the structure of the novel with the goal of conveying the long-term promise of the story early on, and increasing tension across storylines to sustain a reader's interest in the middle sections.

What follows is a brief synopsis of the novel in the style that an agent or editor at a publishing house might request before reviewing the novel itself for consideration for publishing.

## NOVEL SYNOPSIS

*August in the Dog Moon* is the story of three teens Mae, Cody, and Ben who, in their first summer post high school, flee their small Oregon town of Millbrook when police break up a party and find themselves stranded far from home in the forest. Amid the ruins of a ghost-town mining camp, they struggle to survive, and realize that, despite graduating together in a class of fifty, they don't know one another or their secrets.

Mae's father has recently died. Sorting through his possessions, she discovers that her estranged mother had been in contact, contrary to what she's known her entire life. Mae faces a choice: to respond to her mother and make a connection she believed impossible or break from everything in her past. Meanwhile, she grapples with the shadow of a traumatic event that has scared the town: Mae and a girl, Katie, were left behind at a rest stop while on a class trip where Katie disappeared. While stranded in the woods, Mae begins to see Katie in dreams, and forges a closeness with both Ben and Cody she had long since believed wasn't possible for her in Millbrook.

Cody's mother sold his grandparents' home which was the only home he'd known. His abusive father has left the family with little income. Facing few prospects, Cody plans to leave town, but breaks into the old house to recover some hidden possessions and vandalizes the staged furniture. In the woods, he tries to make up for rash and angry choices by taking care of Mae and Ben. He begins to hope they can remain longer, taking measures to prolong their stay, as his feelings for Mae grow.

Ben is a star pitcher and son of wealthy sawmill owner. Hiding a baseball injury to avoid losing a scholarship and trying to keep his friend Cody from being arrested for vandalism in the house Ben's parents, Kent and Larissa bought to flip, Ben drives Mae and Cody into the woods while high and drunk. Getting them stuck, and then injuring his ankle, he struggles to admit his shortcomings while scheming a way to make everything better without facing accountability.

Meanwhile, Ben's little sister Jules struggles to transition to a new house while her busy parents neglect her. With the help of a cartoon Axolotl, she confronts the moral quandary of eating animals, hiding meat from meals in her pocket and conducting secret burials. Her mother, Larissa, endeavors to salvage a risky real estate deal her husband, Kent, has made. She plays a flirtatious cat-and-mouse game with his developer partner, Todd. Her determination to preserve her family's wealth and outrun her past brings Larissa into the circle of a drug-tripping cult and Courtney, a local drug dealer.

When Mae falls ill from a tick bite, tensions between Cody and Ben reach a boiling point. After beating up Ben, Cody ventures through the woods to seek help. He falls into a syncline, injuring his head. Hapless on his own, Ben accidentally starts a forest fire, barely escaping with Mae. Cody wanders lost and ultimately arriving at Courtney's weed farm. In this dangerous world, Cody is indentured to work on greenhouses as Courtney's ambitions grow in anticipation of legalized weed in the state.

Believing Cody perished in the forest fire, Ben and Mae return to lives in Millbrook they no longer recognize. Ben grapples with whether to tell the truth about the fire or let Cody be blamed and make Kent proud as an OSU freshman pitcher. Mae falls under the sway of Todd's charismatic son Talon. It takes finding out that Cody is alive

and at Courtney's farm to shake them from their malaise and into action to save him together. With Jules along as a stowaway, Ben and Mae find their way to a cult meeting on Courtney's property where they must escape with the help of Talon's enigmatic sister, Tessa, and Jules' quest to reach a state of true compassion for all animals.