



READING GROUP GUIDE

We Bring You an Hour of Darkness

By Michael Bourne

Audiobook available from Google Play Books

Narrated by Andrew Litzky

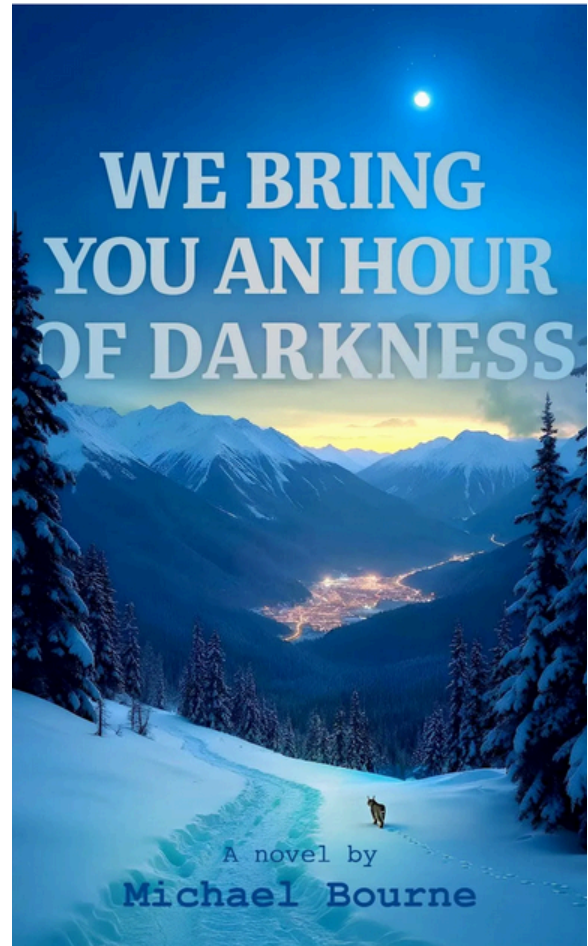
Introduction

It's 1993, and the ski company that runs Franklin, Colorado, plans to build a massive new resort in a wilderness area home to an endangered wildcat. When eco-terrorists begin a series of attacks on infrastructure and property, the FBI sets up a national task force. While the local police and politicians are melting down, it falls to the young reporters at the scrappy Franklin Flyer to solve the crime.

Inspired in part by a real-life 1998 arson at the Vail ski resort and with echoes of more recent events, *We Bring You an Hour of Darkness* tells the gripping story of a town under siege and a newspaper editor who pushes her reporters to unmask the mastermind behind the attacks and uncover an even more underhanded plot by greedy developers to game the system.

"We Bring You an Hour of Darkness is my favorite kind of thriller—one that combines urgent social themes with smart dialogue and a page-turning mystery."

—Lauren Nossett, author of The Resemblance and The Professor



When a shadowy band of eco-terrorists bent on saving a pristine wilderness sabotage the power grid in a Colorado ski town, editor Tish Threadgill and the intrepid reporters at her struggling local newspaper are the only hope to stop the attacks before they turn deadly.



PRAISE

"Bourne, a former reporter at the Aspen Daily News, uses the 1998 eco-terrorism fire in Vail as inspiration for "An Hour of Darkness," a novel set in a fictionalized 1993 Colorado mountain town. ... Good guys always win in books like this [so] it's fun to cheer on the locals back when we actually believed it was possible to stop development in our mountains."

—**Denver Post**

"The stakes are high for the Franklin Skiing Co., but also for Tish, the protagonist, and her hard-working staff at a feisty Western newspaper. Not only must they fight to get the story, but she must also fight to make payroll in the light of pressure from the bank. The Flyer's very existence could be on the line, which for the story outweighs the ski resort controversy. The dedicated employees and the constant pressure they face offer a glimpse into the realities of a small-town newspaper. ... Enjoyable and nonviolent."

—**Kirkus Review**

"Bourne's crisp prose, sharply drawn characters, and keen and often humorous observations of mountain town life make this a compelling read. I loved this book, which made me homesick for newsrooms and for the West."

—**Gwen Florio, author of *Best Laid Plans* and *The Least Among Us***

"Bourne's novel is a mystery wrapped in layers of small-town politics and interpersonal grudges that compelled me to keep reading. His writing is seamless, and he's got the knack of just enough plot hooks, with exactly the right amount of peril for his characters, strung out perfectly to keep the reader wanting more."

—**The British Columbia Review**

"Full of colorful characters, Michael Bourne's new novel immerses you in the weird realities of working for a scrappy newspaper in a Colorado ski town besieged by development pressure. *We Bring You an Hour of Darkness* moves fast and will leave you wanting more pages to turn."

—**Brent Gardner-Smith, founder, Aspen Journalism**



"*We Bring You an Hour of Darkness* is a page-turner with the precision plot-making of a procedural mystery and the richly drawn characterization of a literary novel."

—Kirsten Lunstrum, author of *Elita* and *What We Do With the Wreckage*

Part mystery, part eco-thriller, part historical fiction, *We Bring You an Hour of Darkness* is one compelling novel, combining a well-crafted plot with complicated characters I could root for. With fluid prose and a few surprising twists, Michael Bourne immerses his readers into this 1990s ski town and its band of intrepid reporters. A thoughtful and riveting read.

—Edan Lepucki, author of *Woman No. 17* and *Time's Mouth*

READING GROUP QUESTIONS

- If the government or private companies won't listen to nonviolent protest, are bombings and arson ever justified? If so, where do you draw the line and why?
- The novel is set in 1993 before the internet decimated print newspapers. How have digital advances changed local news coverage where you live? How would this story be different if its characters had access to cellphones and the internet?
- In the novel, reporters trick their sources (Moirra), track them down on their morning runs (Tish), and show up uninvited at their homes (Perry). Do the reporters go too far to get their stories? Where is the line, in your view?
- At one point, Perry reflects that "people underestimate the power of a friendly guy who asks a lot of questions" (p. 117). Is this true? Moira Mangan, who is much pushier and not above trickery, appears to be a more effective reporter. Which would work best on you if a reporter was trying to get information out of you? Which strategy would you use if you were the reporter trying to get information from a reluctant source?



READING GROUP QUESTIONS, cont.

- Tish Threadgill is in many ways the novel's moral center. What do you think accounts for her strength of character? Did she remind you of anyone you know or any public figures (of any gender)?
- Tish's brother and mother both took their own lives, and Tish tells her boyfriend Scott that "crazy runs through [her] family like the mighty Mississippi" (p. 135), but Tish herself appears quite sane. What long-term effects of her family's history of mental illness do you see in Tish? How does her family history affect the decisions she makes in the book, both with the paper and in her relationships?
- In ski towns like Franklin, being considered a "local" means a great deal, but in this book, as is the case in many real-life ski towns, many of the central figures are originally from somewhere else. How are locals and outsiders presented in the book? What difference does their origin story make in their decisions and how you interpret their actions?
- What stands out most for you about the *Flyer's* newsroom? How does it operate as another character in the book?
- Would you want to read *Screwdriver in the Gears*? Why do you think Bill Blanning became a successful writer? What forces affected what happened to his success and fame, or maybe better, infamy?
- Early in the novel, Blanning tells reporter Moira Mangan "the most constructive thing a committed lover of the Earth can do is shoot himself" (p. 29). Turning this cynical statement about the human race's impact on the environment on its head, what are some of the most constructive things a committed environmentalist can do? Specifically in mountain towns?
- Does the Jack Frost Collective remind you of any social movements, activists, or organizations in the news today? What are the differences between those who achieve their goals, and those who self-destruct? Have we learned anything from the past to help us create more meaningful or lasting change?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Michael Bourne has been a contributor to the New York Times, The Economist, Tin House, and Literary Hub, among other publications, and has had his stories published widely in literary magazines. His debut novel *Blithedale Canyon* received rave reviews in *Publishers Weekly*, *Zyzzya*, and *Rain Taxi*, which called it, "A clever blend of literary fiction with elements of crime and noir ... [whose] cinematic quality comes from characters that demand a performance." For this novel, Bourne draws on his experience as a reporter at the *Aspen Daily News*, the pages of which were filled with a witch's brew of charismatic wanderers, frontiersmen and women, and charlatans who populate mountain ski towns. He lives in Vancouver, Canada, with his wife and son.

ABOUT THE NARRATOR

Andrew Litzky is an actor, theater producer and podcast editor who has been performing, doing voiceover work, and producing in Seattle, WA since 1990. He is a disabled person, living with the degenerative neurological syndrome Charcot-Marie-Tooth, CMT, similar to Muscular Dystrophy. As Co-Founder of theater simple, Andrew has performed in and produced over 50 productions, has toured internationally, directed all technical matters, and created both indoor and outdoor "shoestring epics", all the while performing at over 50 national and international festivals on three continents and logging well over 250,000 miles. Andrew has acted regionally with the Berkeley Repertory Theatre and at the Spoleto Festival (Charleston, SC), internationally throughout Canada, at the Adelaide Fringe Festival (AU) and Singapore Arts Festival, and locally with literally dozens of theater companies. He is grateful to and ever-so in awe of his co-conspirator in life and art, Llysa.



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