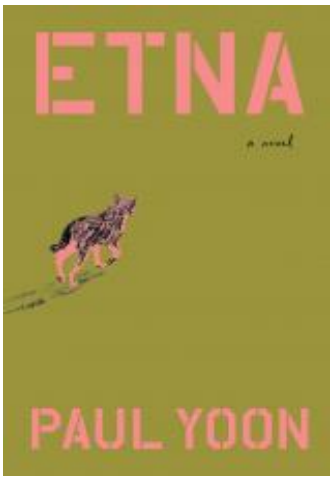
Etna

by Paul Yoon



About the Book

Beloved author Paul Yoon, winner of The Story Prize, is back with the unforgettable story of a working dog, Etna, who, after a devastating war, embarks on an odyssey in the hopes of returning home.

Set in a fictional country in the present day, this is a story told through the eyes of an ex-military dog, Etna. After surviving years of a devastating war, Etna decides one night to leave the men he has fought alongside for years and return home --- to the place where he was taken from when he was young, in the thin but persistent hope that if a home exists for him, it might be there.

Thus begins an exhilarating odyssey told through the eyes of a dog as he traverses across ruined landscapes and fights to survive in a world that, even in peacetime, proves to be just as precarious. Along the way, he encounters other animals and humans who are attempting to figure out how to start again. What makes a life when there is no home to go back to? How do we begin to trust each other again after such profound loss?

This is a novel about the power of an idea, about never giving up, and ultimately a novel about finding hope in the most dire of times.

Discussion Guide

1. This story is told through Etna?s eyes. How does the perspective of a dog shape the story? What language and sensory details might have been different if it were from the perspective of a human?

2. ETNA is an odyssey, in the sense that it depicts a journey home. What about this classic form is transmuted by this story?

3. Why do you think the two epigraphs were chosen? Revisiting them now after finishing the story, do they hold a different resonance?

4. Soojin is the only human who can understand Etna. What does this tell you about her character? Why do you think she possesses this special understanding?

5. Animals seem to have no such language barriers with one another. Etna speaks with a donkey, a cat, a bird, and with other dogs. Why do you think Paul Yoon made this creative choice? How does communication create closeness between some characters and distance between others?

6. Which encounters of Etna?s did you find the most moving? Why?

7. This war unfolds in a fictional, present-day country. Why do you think Yoon chose to fictionalize the country instead of choosing one we know?

8. As Etna follows the train tracks to the city, he says, ?I was aware, with a new intensity, of my aloneness? (68). How does loneliness and isolation shape Etna?s journey? How does this inform the importance of pack, of community, and of home?

9. What is your interpretation of the ending?

Author Bio

Paul Yoon is the author of six works of fiction: ETNA; ONCE THE SHORE, a *New York Times* Notable Book; SNOW HUNTERS, winner of the Young Lions Fiction Award; THE MOUNTAIN, an NPR Best Book of the Year; RUN ME TO EARTH, a *Time* Must-Read Book of 2020 and longlisted for the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction; and THE HIVE AND THE HONEY, winner of the 20th Annual Story Prize and longlisted for the Joyce Carol Oates Prize.

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