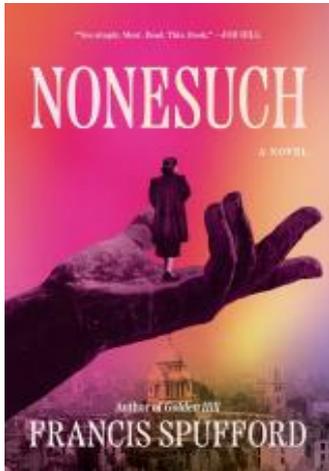


Nonesuch

by Francis Spufford



About the Book

A spellbinding tale about an ambitious young woman who must thwart an occult plot by time-traveling fascists during the chaos of the London Blitz --- from "one of our most powerful writers of wayward historical fiction" (*The Washington Post*).

Following the acclaim of his previous novels, *GOLDEN HILL* and *CAHOKIA JAZZ*, Francis Spufford delivers a masterpiece of literary fantasy, hailed by Joe Hill as "a book that scoops up all the wonder and hope and pleasure of the *Narnia* novels and pours it into a story for grown-ups."

It's the summer of 1939, and the air in London is thick with the tension of impending war. Iris Hawkins, a fiery young financial secretary, has a chance encounter with Geoff, a genius engineer from the new technology of television. What was supposed to be one night of abandon draws her instead into a nightmare of otherworldly pursuit --- into a reality where time bends, spirits can be summoned, and history hangs by a thread.

Soon there are Nazi planes droning overhead. In a time when death falls randomly from above each night, when the streets are darker than the wildest forest and all the men are away in uniform, the defense of the city is in the hands of its women. But Iris has more to contend with than just the terrors of the Blitz. Over the rooftops of burning London, in the twisted passages between past and present, through the vast night sky and across the tiny screens of early television, a fascist fanatic is traveling with a gun in her hand, and only Iris can stop her from altering the course of history forever.

Both a thrilling page-turner and a profound exploration of ambition, love and the fight against tyranny, *NONESUCH* is a story that is as enchanting as it is urgent. Packed with twists, tension and wonder, it is a triumph of storytelling.

Discussion Guide

1. The prologue thrusts the reader into the middle of a magical story and ends with the line "But that was much later." How does this set the scene for the story and its characters? What does it tell us about the story's world?
2. After leaving Wildwood Terrace, how do Iris's feelings shift after her night with Geoff? Do you think they would have met again had it not been for the angel?
3. While discussing their first meeting at the Kinesis Club, Iris tells Lall, "I took Fortress Geoff pretty much by surprise attack, if you know what I mean" (page 151). Besides what she is insinuating, in what other ways does this ring true?
4. While Iris is initially hesitant to return to Wildwood Terrace and visit Mr. Hale, what do you think compels her to continue returning?
5. How does Iris and Geoff's relationship grow once he is drafted into the army? Reflect on how Iris's perspective changes in her letters to him after her initial hesitation to respond.
6. Discuss the parallels between the Order and Grand Master and the fascists during World War II. How do you feel about Mr. Hale being a member of the Order, something Bluey even pointed out?
7. Iris and Lall have opposing motives throughout the story, beginning with their initial conversation on their political views up until the journey to Nonesuch. What are the similarities between the two women?
8. Much of the book takes place during the London Blitz. How does this historical context contribute to the tension of Iris's mission to find Nonesuch?
9. During one of the nightly raids, Iris reflects on her relationship with Geoff after he visits on leave. She reminds herself, "*He is motherless.... He is frightened of the people he loves disappearing?*" (page 315). In what ways can we see how Geoff's upbringing affects him and his relationship with Iris?
10. Iris confesses her ambitions to be rich in a conversation with Geoff about the war. She admits, "I do like money.... I want to be a tycoon...and when I am, I want everyone to know that I'm also Iris Hawkins from Watford" (pages 394-95). Do her aspirations surprise you? Recall other parts in the book where we may have seen these ambitions hinted at earlier.
11. Which London do you think Iris feels more at home in, the safe but conventional city of the opening, or the place of fire and ruin we see London becoming?

Author Bio

Francis Spufford began as the author of four highly praised books of nonfiction. His first book, *I MAY BE SOME TIME*, won the Writers Guild Award for Best Nonfiction Book of 1996, the Banff Mountain Book Prize, and a Somerset Maugham Award. It was followed by *THE CHILD THAT BOOKS BUILT*, *BACKROOM BOYS* and, most recently, *UNAPOLOGETIC*.

But with *RED PLENTY* in 2012, he switched to the novel. *GOLDEN HILL* won multiple literary prizes on both sides of the Atlantic; *LIGHT PERPETUAL* was longlisted for the Booker Prize; and *CAHOLIA JAZZ* was longlisted for the Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction and won the Sidewise Award for Alternate History.

In England, he is a Fellow of both the Royal Society of Literature and the Royal Historical Society. He teaches writing at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

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