



Not Dark Yet

Berit Ellingsen

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Brandon leaves his boyfriend in the city for a quiet life in the mountains, after an affair with a professor ends with Brandon being forced to kill a research animal. It is a violent, unfortunate episode that conjures memories from his military background.

In the mountains, his new neighbors are using the increased temperatures to stage an agricultural project in an effort to combat globally heightened food prices and shortages. Brandon gets swept along with their optimism, while simultaneously applying to a new astronaut training program. However, he learns that these changes—internal, external—are irreversible.

A sublime love story coupled with the universal struggle for personal understanding, *Not Dark Yet* is an informed novel of consequences with an ever-tightening emotional grip on the reader.

"Fascinating, surreal, gorgeously written, and like nothing you've ever read before, *Not Dark Yet* is the book we all need to read right now. It is art about science, climate change, and activism, and it vitally explores how we as people deal with a world that is transforming in terrifying ways."

—*BuzzFeed*

"[Ellingsen] is just starting what promises to be a major career, but already giving readers a unique and fascinating perspective."

—Jeff VanderMeer

"I cannot remember the last time a writer impressed me so quickly."

—*InDigest Magazine*

Berit Ellingsen is a Korean Norwegian writer and former bookseller whose stories have appeared in W.W. Norton's *Flash Fiction International Anthology*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, and *Unstuck*. She is the author of the story collection *Beneath the Liquid Skin*, and the novel *Une Ville Vide*, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and the British Science Fiction Award.

Not Dark Yet Details

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From Reader Review Not Dark Yet for online ebook

Andrew Finazzo says

I started reading this novel blind (I got it as part of a Science Fiction bundle) and the most interesting bit was in the beginning when I was guessing what it might be about.

Ellingsen's writing style seemed to focus on intentionally confusing the reader by being unnecessarily circumspect. For example, Ellingsen tells us the main character's name in the first sentence of the book then refuses to repeat it again. We quickly become befuddled with sentences similar to these: "Bob bought a dog. He didn't like dogs." - with "He" being the main character and Bob being someone else. On a larger scale I didn't know if the story followed multiple characters and spent a long time trying to discern that (it doesn't).

On a larger scale the time and place of the novel is never directly revealed. This is tiresome since the driving force behind the plot is a preachily presented warning about the impact of global warming.

Plotlines come and go with no fanfare, time frames are jumbled for no apparent reason, and the book generally seems to be trying to feel mysterious by adding layers of intentional clunkiness.

Kyle Muntz says

A really interesting, very subtle novel, which is very different from what most readers will expect it to be. There's a lot of stillness and silence: a stark, coolly narrated depiction of a character retreating into self-imposed solitude, which (throughout the novel) also becomes the dismantling of his relationship with his boyfriend and his family. It's a difficult novel to read in some ways, though when I finished it, I realized I'd been misreading the earlier sections: that the stillness in this novel isn't the peace the character is looking for, but that's it's really an incomplete movement towards nothingness, which is maybe most pronounced in a long digression near the end where we see a monk mummifying himself, and this really fascinating moment where the character wishes he could have done that himself.

I struggled a lot with how Brandon treated his boyfriend in particular (who he intentionally distances himself from, but without making moves to communicate or end their relationship), though I don't think I realized until the last twenty pages how damaged the character is; and, at least for me, this is where the parallels with the environment come in, of irreparable damages that become impossible to come back from. This novel's treatment of climate change is fairly familiar, but it's very much in the background--and what we get (instead of a sort of cli-fi thriller, despite one point near the end where the novel briefly hints at becoming one) is this stark, subtle portrait of a failure to recover from emotional trauma... then the realization that, after what the character has been through, even moving away from other people isn't enough.

There's a sort of distant, calculated coolness to the narration, which segues very naturally into periods of dreamlike cosmic imagery. And this kind of distance is built into almost every part of Brandon: his relationship with his family and his boyfriend; to his own trauma; and even, moment to moment, to the story as it happens. It makes the book difficult to process in some ways, especially because this is a story about someone who destroys his life for the sake of a stillness that also doesn't satisfy him, one that never apologizes for itself or wants you to empathize with its characters--but it's also what makes it impressive. I think the last fifty pages are especially striking, and I particularly appreciate where the novel ends, in a place

that's difficult but also feels very right.

deep says

PW Starred: This suspenseful and haunting novel follows ex-sniper Brandon Minamoto as he relocates from his unnamed North American city to a secluded cabin in the mountains. Brandon wants to find a clearer version of himself through self-imposed exile. His isolation conjures vivid dreams and memories of the world he is retreating from: his time in the military; his brother, Katsuhiko; and his lovers, Michael and Kaye. The story deepens, unfolding in short chapters that rise and fall like waves. Several strangers arrive at the cabin and ask to use some of Brandon's land for an unconventional agricultural project. After suffering an unexpected fall in the woods while running, Brandon visits a doctor and sees someone from his recent past. Meanwhile, he continues to advance in his application process to participate in a manned mission to Mars. The branches of these seemingly unconnected events begin to cross and merge, leading Brandon to major realizations. Ellingsen (*Beneath Liquid Skin*) projects a feeling of encroaching darkness on every page, "the shadow of a Kraken passing beneath the surface," and this tension guides the narrative like a purposeful current. Expansive and unsettling descriptions make it easy to fall under the story's spell. This is a remarkable novel from a very talented author. (Nov.)

Kevin Catalano says

I don't know how Ellingsen pulled off this novel of seemingly disparate plot points -- a dead owl, wheat farming, astronaut try-outs, a renegade mission -- filled with abstract dreams, and set in an unknown place and time where climate change is the underlying force. And yet, the result is a beautifully mysterious, wonderfully written, and **cohesive** novel that, it's safe to say, is unlike anything I've ever read. Since I'm familiar with Ellingsen's work, I've come to expect the unexpected; *Not Dark Yet* proves that she has a unique vision, one that will evolve the reader and change the way we understand the novel.

jess says

What a strange little book. I'm left thinking about how our lives become the sum of our reactions to trauma? And something something something about global warming and space travel being intertwined..... I don't know.

Are you the sort of person who would, say, blow up a power plant to stop the production of greenhouse gases? Or are you the sort of person who would seek a new home on another planet; perhaps you'd like to help terraform Mars? We can all grapple with these types of questions, but we rarely have to answer them.

Kristin-Leigh says

I won't lie, I really hated this book - the writing felt really purple at times in an amateurish (almost fanfiction-y?) way and it felt to me like Ellingsen was fighting to hit a certain word/pagecount frequently, the way the narrative would get into every detail of the most rote activities - the chapter dedicated to a character paying his restaurant bill, anyone??

The characters all felt generic to me, too, or else more like a checklist of common tropes than a set of people - of *course* Brandon carries around the guilt of killing kids as an army sniper and for some reason has untreated epilepsy that he needs to hide to appear strong!

All stuff I can forgive in a novel with a really page-turner plot or at least a really unique concept, and NDY just didn't deliver on those fronts for me.

I may be alone in these feelings though, given the number of great reviews it has!

Meghan says

I liked this readable near-future quasi-dystopia, and it's a slim attractive book. A military veteran moves to a cabin, leaving his boyfriend back in the city. Others living near the cabin are trying to convert mountain bogs into wheat fields, which they can do because of climate change. There are chapters of how he came to this place, including time spent as a photographer at a research university, where he took photos of owls being used as research subjects. I would describe the mood as quietly dark but graceful.

Kathy says

Five stars, of course! Loved it. Nobody writes like Berit Ellingsen.

Judy says

At times, because I read incessantly, I grow weary of novels published by the major houses; novels that are written and released with the intention to reach a majority of readers and to sell. For palate cleansing I turn to books from indie publishers. Two Dollar Radio is such a one, run out of their home in Columbus, OH, by a husband and wife team. Berit Ellingsen is a Korean-Norwegian science writer and novelist who lives in Norway and writes in English. *Not Dark Yet* is her second novel.

A weird and wondrous novel it is. The first sentence: "Sometimes, in Brandon Minamoto's dreams, he found a globe or a map of the world with a continent he hadn't seen before." He has just left his boyfriend in the city and gone to live in a decrepit cabin in the mountains, seeking quiet. His military experiences and an incident when he felt forced to kill a research owl haunt him. Inner quiet and outer space are his quests. He hopes to be accepted into the space program as an astronaut.

His life in the cabin moves as slowly as a glacier through fall, winter, and early spring. In flash backs we

learn his history and gradually come to realize that you wouldn't want this guy in a spaceship with you.

As a teen, he used to dream of a "round body of water the color of the sky" that echoes a fountain he had visited with his mother when he was a toddler.

During a visit to their paternal grandparents in Korea, he and his brother went to a shrine containing the relic of a monk who had been mummified after fasting to death. Then follows a story (from inside Brandon's mind?) of the monk's long and agonizing journey into the spirit world through starvation. Brandon's conclusion is "He wanted to be happy. What more does human life have to offer?"

Self-imposed loneliness, more dreams of a bodiless spirit nature, training his body to survive in space, and a brief foray into environmental terrorism follow. In a refreshing twist, this is not a post-apocalyptic novel but a pre-apocalyptic one. The awareness of climate change, melting ice, rising sea levels, violent storms, food shortages, and animals going extinct, permeate the story.

Written in close third person making you feel you are in Brandon's head, seeing with his eyes, feeling the cold, longing for space, this is a novel that might convince even a climate denier to have another look. Not since Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* have I experienced such an intense second sight meditation on where we are headed. Except that in *Not Dark Yet*, the elegant symmetry between one man's yearning and the demise of the entire race moves it several paces away from an eco thriller.

The tone is more like early J G Ballard. Deadpan recital of mundane daily events punctuated with explosions of disaster or Brandon's surreal dreams. I finished the book and could not leave the world she had created for hours. I cleaned the house and ordered Christmas presents. I tried to read another book. No go. This is why I read!

Rob says

Enigmatic, oddly moving. Now that I've finished I'm not quite sure where it all led me to, but I enjoyed the trip.

Jared says

If you were fortunate enough to know of Vandermeer Mixtape via Storybundle, as I was, you may have been lucky enough to get your hands on Berit Ellingsen's wonderful *Not Dark Yet*. If not, grab it and read it right now.

Not Dark Yet is a quiet and dark and cold story, but none of these to an extent that punishes the reader. It's about love, but not necessarily romantic. About family, but not gratuitously tragic the way literary fiction can be. (Although speculative fiction may be more apt, given the exaggerated sense of environmental danger occurring around the characters). It's about the forces of nature, and climate change--its ultimate, creeping power over us, our decisions, our past and future. Science is a powerful recurring character in this book: growing crops in mild winters, environmentalists, Brandon's desire to go into space. All handled with an understated prose that's never stale and sometimes starkly beautiful.

The protagonist's name is mentioned once, in the first line, and for the rest of the story, Ellingsen only uses "he." I never confused him with other male characters, and had this sense of the story moving in one, continuous stream, despite multiple subplots.

One scene that stands out to me: Brandon dreams of being on a cruise ship as it crashes. Of that particular and familiar horror, being in a violent dream and being unable to escape it as it happens, knowing cataclysmic danger is coming but being powerless against it, and it's all so *personal*, felt like a wonderful metaphor for how the character felt at this point in the book.

"But no life boats were lowered, no life jackets hurled into the still water, no mayday sent out, because they were all there voluntarily, enjoying the sight of the jetstam going down and thanking the multitude gods that it wasn't them."

Ultimately, I read this as a book about ghosts, and light in the face of them. It would be easy to say it's a climate change story and leave it there, but Brandon has so much more to him than that. It's about the world we build for ourselves. The signs of danger we see decades before they become actual problems, the reasons we act as we do even when we know we shouldn't. It's a book about hope, even when a hurricane destroys the work you've done in the autumn of your life.

Not Dark Yet was the first book I read in 2016, and comes highly recommended.

Julianne (Outlandish Lit) says

I'll be real, I grabbed this book because of the pretty cover and the Jeff VanderMeer blurb on the back. *Not Dark Yet* is a new novella in the cli-fi (climate fiction) genre. The world's going to shit due to global warming. People are running out of food. The weather's all out of whack. And the main character, Brandon, just needs to get away from it all. So he moves to a remote cabin in the mountains somewhere, leaving his boyfriend behind. This novella jumps around in time a little bit covering a bunch of interesting plot points. An affair with a professor that goes bad, an agricultural project he joins in the mountains, applying to be an astronaut who will live on Mars, some random military stuff, AND MORE.

All of these things are SO interesting and the book had a lot of potential to do all sorts of stuff. Unfortunately, however, Brandon is just not that interesting of a guy. His character is so flat that it's hard to care about any of his (often briefly touched upon) plights. As much as I love concise books, I feel like Ellingsen could've done a lot with more pages. Anyway, I can't mention the other thing I didn't like because it would spoil the whole book. So in short, I really loved most of the stuff that went down in this story, I really super loved what the book was saying (it's so good), but I wasn't blown away with how it was done. If any of this sounds interesting to you, it's worth checking out, if only just to instagram the cover.

Full review: [Outlandish Lit - 3 Dark & Weird Books of 2015](#)

Ryan Bradford says

Like if Le Carre wrote a "Man vs. Nature" story. Ellingsen's writing is meticulous and direct, which gives this book an underlying, ominous tension that kind of makes you hold your breath as you read it.

Edward Rathke says

Read an early version of this novel and absolutely loved it. I may add to this review later or write a new review closer to when it comes out.

Helen McClory says

This is a quietly powerful book about an emotionally distant man in a dislocated world on the brink of environmental collapse. The detail - to the point of excess - serves to add to the sense of an echoing world of things and bare sensation. Though it moves slowly, the journey is not at all a predictable one, and the ending, when it comes, punches hard.
