

Book Review: On Heaven's Hill  
By Kim Heacox

Thanks to NetGalley and West Margin Press for this advance reader's copy, in exchange for an honest review. "On Heaven's Hill" is scheduled for publication in November 2024.

In Plato's *The Republic*, circa 375 BC, the Greek philosopher first noted that art imitates life. More recently, Kim Heacox has followed that philosophy in his soon-to-be-released novel "On Heaven's Hill." Think environmental and nature issues, protests, people vs. government, and wounded war veterans, and you get the picture.

One of the problems, however, is that the picture gets a little too preachy in spots. But more on that later.

The narrative flows from three different perspectives. Salt D'Alene is a former wolf trapper now working in an auto repair shop in Strawberry Flats, Alaska, and struggling to support his wife and four sons – one of whom, Solomon, has been diagnosed with muscular dystrophy. Medical bills are a huge concern.

The second voice belongs to 12-year-old Kes (short for Kestrel) Nash. Her father, Danny, was a successful singer/songwriter in a Texas-based band called Whoa Nellie until Grandpa (we never learn his actual name) convinced him to join the Texas National Guard for some extra money. He winds up getting sent to Afghanistan where he's almost blown to bits and has both legs amputated below the knee. His older brother, Ty Nash, convinces the family to move to Alaska as part of Danny's rehabilitation.

Lastly, Heacox offers us a unique perspective – that of Silver, a young wolf living in the wilds of Alaska, traversing the landscape with his family.

As you may have guessed, these three perspectives, or storylines, begin to intersect about midway through the book. Salt is secretly offered a lot of money by some government folks to track wolf movement as part of the state's coalbed methane project. Kes and her friends get wind of the project and somehow mobilize hundreds of local residents and veterans from all over to form a resistance. Silver and his family begin to live in fear over the changing landscape.

And of course, everything comes to a head when the National Guard is brought in to quell the resistance.

The three narrative perspectives alternate nicely, and offer a pretty in-depth understanding of the main characters and related family members. Salt wants desperately to provide for his family. Kes wants to preserve the wildlife.

Heacox's bias comes through periodically with references to the current Washington, D.C. administration, such as this president "watches a lot of television" and "thinks windmills (wind turbines) cause cancer." And that's okay. But toward the end there are lengthy diatribes characters launch into that sound more like candidate speeches than normal dialogue. The point of the story comes through naturally; the sermons are too over the top.

There are also some inconsistencies. I was left wondering how someone signing up with the Texas National Guard, which requires one weekend per month and one month per year of service, winds up in Afghanistan. And how a group of 12-year olds is able to marshal the forces of an entire community, and then some.

Still, “On Heaven’s Hill” is an interesting read that throws light on some of the polarizing and potentially explosive issues facing our country today. I would give it 3.5 out of 5 stars, and welcome your thoughts if you check it out once it’s published.