

Waiting for Al Gore

Bob Katz

Flexible Press (Feb 20, 2024)

Softcover \$19.00 (276pp)

979-898872132-1

In Bob Katz's novel *Waiting For Al Gore*, a journalist and an environmentalist working in Vermont use one another's skills and contacts to achieve their own goals.

Lenny is a journalist searching for the story that will earn him a book deal. A lead takes him to Vermont. There, he meets Rachel, an accomplished author and the founder of EarthKare, an organization with "a reputation for picking ideological fights." Rachel is organizing an environmental conference and needs to rally attendees. She hopes to secure Al Gore as the lead speaker; he is the key to the conference's success—or so she thinks. In fact, the reappearance of a regional thrush that was thought extinct affects the conference's outcome more than Rachel's planning could.

The Vermont setting is described in vibrant terms, with notes of its "fairy-tale beauty" and "swooping valleys, all green and gold, capped by a blue blue sky." But this serenity and purity also means that the location is remote; it is a struggle to transport attendees to EarthKare's base camp. Indeed, getting them there, and feeding them all, clashes with the environmentalists' values, including their desires to lower carbon emissions and nonbiodegradable waste.

The prose has a melancholic tone, though its language is conversational and increasingly direct, securing immersion. The story is told via a split narration, trading time between Lenny and Rachel and including frequent flashbacks. Lenny and Rachel make compromises when it comes to their expectations for the conference; these aid them in attaining their goals, though the successes or failures of individual people seem to have little impact on others.

In the novel *Waiting for Al Gore* a journalist immerses himself in an environmentalist's world, where everyone has a dream and an angle.

MARY MCNICHOL (January / February 2024)

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