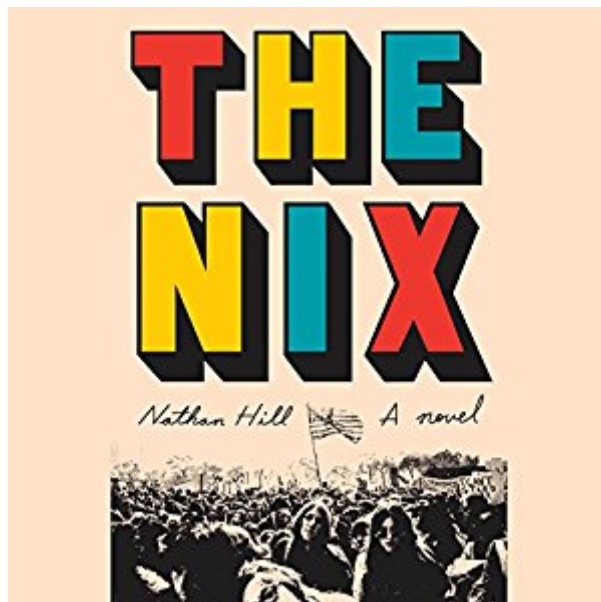


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The Nix: A Novel



Synopsis

A Nix can take many forms. In Norwegian folklore it is a spirit who sometimes appears as a white horse that steals children away. In Nathan Hill's remarkable first novel, a Nix is anything you love that one day disappears, taking with it a piece of your heart. It's 2011, and Samuel Andresen-Anderson - college professor, stalled writer - has a Nix of his own: his mother, Faye. He hasn't seen her in decades, not since she abandoned the family when he was a boy. Now she's reappeared, having committed an absurd crime that electrifies the nightly news, beguiles the Internet, and inflames a politically divided country. The media paints Faye as a radical hippie with a sordid past, but as far as Samuel knows, his mother was an ordinary girl who married her high school sweetheart. Which version of his mother is true? Two facts are certain: She's facing some serious charges, and she needs Samuel's help. To save her, Samuel will have to embark on his own journey, uncovering long-buried secrets about the woman he thought he knew, secrets that stretch across generations and have their origin all the way back in Norway, home of the mysterious Nix. As he does so, Samuel will confront not only Faye's losses but also his own lost love and will relearn everything he thought he knew about his mother and himself. From the suburban Midwest to New York City to the 1968 riots that rocked Chicago and beyond, *The Nix* explores - with sharp humor and a fierce tenderness - the resilience of love and home, even in times of radical change.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 21 hours 50 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Random House Audio

Audible.com Release Date: August 30, 2016

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B01I5HLAZ8

Best Sellers Rank: #45 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Historical Fiction #117 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Humor & Satire > Humorous #264 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Family Life

Customer Reviews

Samuel is an underachieving assistant professor of literature at a nothing college outside Chicago

who dislikes his students, spends way too much time playing an online fantasy game, got a huge advance for a novel he never wrote, and is pining for the girl he loved when he was eleven. His life is stalled out big time, but he is dragged out of stasis when his estranged mother, who abandoned him when he was eleven and has never been heard from since, makes national headlines for throwing rocks at a Presidential candidate - she is the Packer Attacker! Through a ridiculous series of events, Samuel is tasked with writing his mother's life story, and is forced to investigate her life since leaving him. The Nix is the story of how mother and son came to where they are -- and where they might go from here. But really, this basic plot description does not begin to do this book justice. Nathan Hill has a dazzling imagination, and the feats of writing that he performs are an absolute joy to experience. He writes one chapter from the POV of a gaming addict, an internal stream of consciousness in which the character makes elaborate plans to quit gaming, but talks himself out of it. This is ten pages, one paragraph, and it is absolutely mesmerizing -- funny and insightful and sad, about the stories we tell ourselves. Another chapter is just a conversation between Samuel and the lawyer who is representing his mother, nothing but dialogue, and it is hysterical. Another chapter is a Choose Your Own Adventure mini-book explaining how Samuel's relationship with a violin prodigy came unraveled, because Samuel does not choose wisely. Another chapter is...you get the picture. The story of Samuel and his mother is a jumping-off point for Mr. Hill to write about a huge range of things: let's see, he covers second-rate higher education, gaming addicts, the ravenous news media, music prodigies, child abuse, child abandonment, thwarted love, the 1960s counter-cultural revolution, Allan Ginsberg, Walter Cronkite -- at one point, no joke, there is a sequence inside the head of Walter Cronkite where he imagines himself as a bird flying above the Chicago riots... and I still haven't skimmed the surface of all the things this book is really about. And if I have a criticism, that's what it is. This book is about so many things, it is so wildly ambitious and imagined, that at times it seems to get a bit out of control. Around the time Walter Cronkite was imagining himself as a bird, I was thinking, hmm, a little editing might have helped some. Reading The Nix feels a bit like watching a wildly talented thoroughbred run -- and win -- its first race. You see the immense beauty of the animal, the strength, the speed, it easily outpaces the rest of the field, you know you're at the beginning of something special. Yes, the horse is a little wild, a little undisciplined, maybe veers around the track a bit, maybe tires at the end, but my gosh. You want to turn to everyone around you and say "Did you SEE that?" And one last thing. So many books these days are being written with a lot of technique, but they're lacking in heart. What makes this book special, to me, is that Mr. Hill's heart is as generous as his talent. He writes fantastic sentences, he has astonishing craft, but beyond that, he has true empathy, compassion and hope. He sees the

insanity of the world, but he also has hope for our future. And I have tremendous hope for his.

I wasn't sure about this book at first but warmed up to it about a third of the way through. There are a lot of funny parts that were fun to read. By about the 3/4 mark, though, it was overkill. It was an okay read but not a book I would recommend to others.

Wow! (Sigh.) Wow! (Sigh.) Oh, wait. This is a book review. I should use real words to describe it. Let's see...Genius. Astounding. Mind-boggling. An absolute must-read. I would give it 10 stars if I could. The title of the book comes from a Norwegian superstition about the Nix, a cruel, vicious water spirit that appears in the form of a gentle horse. The moral of this fable is that the things you love the most will hurt you the worst. Due to author Nathan Hill's incredibly creative structure, style and plot execution, this is unlike any novel I have ever read. The plot, which is complex and jumps back and forth primarily between 2011 and 1968, is far too difficult to summarize here. Read the official reviews for that, but know that you'll only get a sliver of it. The plot simply defies succinct description! But don't worry. Complex though it is, it is easy to follow. As much as this book is about plot, it is even more about the characters. The main character is Samuel, a young professor of English at a small liberal arts college outside Chicago. He is the hub from which the other characters are the spokes--his mother who abandoned him when he was a child, a beautiful violin prodigy and her twin brother, a student who obsessively cheats, '60s college radicals, a violent police officer named Charlie Brown and a video gamer who plays to such excess that this addiction has extraordinarily dire effects on his health and brain. One of the most interesting aspects of the author's form/function is that we as readers know things--a lot of things--that the characters don't know (or take a LONG time to learn/figure out). So we have background and insight into what is happening in a boldly innovative way that is curiously effective. Most of all, Nathan Hill has accomplished every author's ideal hat trick: Great literature, highly-enjoyable entertainment and commercial success.

While there were portions of the book that were so reflective of exactly what it was like to come of age in the 60's (the home ec class became a refresher on exactly what it was like for those of us who were brought up before women's lib). There were far too many portions that just left off after going into great detail about what was happening in the present - especially the protagonist - and left so many things unresolved. I echo the other review that this book left me feeling like I wish he had a better editor. Don't get me wrong, I think he will become one of the "must read" authors in his

later books; but I'm truly sick of the newest craze of time jumping in books - most of the time just because - not for any important reason; and I think the books suffer from that - I would like them to stop jumping around in time so much and if they go back to an earlier time, just bring it to the present. I saw no reason that his mother's story had to be so chopped up. It didn't help the book move forward; it just made me have to go back and check what year the chapter before was dated. I admire John Irving immensely and actually bought this based on his blurb. While a promising writer, this man has a long way to go before coming close to how Dickens wrote. Just as I would get absorbed in on perspective of the story, I'd have to switch gears and start on another. I didn't find that useful in the telling of the tale - more irritating than anything else. Don't get me wrong, this is a book that should be read, especially by the baby boomers, but it just isn't great.

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