



# Beyond the Wall

Books Reviewed:

[Beyond the Wall](#) [1]

Issue:

[224](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Geoff Fox](#) [3]

Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

?Snow lies deep. Bitter cold days. Dark nights, when the veil between this world and the next grows thin. A time to shelter. To sit close around the fire. To rest. To remember.? So the tale begins, and Tanya Landman proves true to the promise of danger, mystery and reflection implicit in her opening lines. This is an adventure of risk and deception, set in a wild land echoing with the howls of spectral wolves and the whispers of women who are neither living nor dead. Roman Britain, where the life of a slave counts for nothing, where women ? captive or free ? walk in fear of men who, with very few exceptions, are sexual predators, gluttons and drunkards, devoid of self-awareness or nuanced feeling.

The story is crowded with action and surprise. Fifteen year old Cassia is a slave at the mercy and whim of her master, Titus Cornelius Festus; she works in the fields of his prosperous estate a day or two?s journey from Londinium. When Titus decides it is Cassia?s turn to serve his pleasure, she responds to an impulse of 'wild, wolfish rage' within her with such violence that she bites off a piece of her master?s ear before he can rape her. Her flight takes her racing through the forest where she is defended from her pursuers by a wolf-pack which appears from nowhere (gentle with her, savage with her hunters); then aboard a river-going trader to the edge of Londinium and so to a chance meeting with Marcus Aurelius Aquila. He stands apart from all the other Romans in the novel. Although he doesn?t recognise it for many a mile, the journey on which he embarks with Cassia will lead him not only beyond the northern Wall and into Barbarian lands, (and thence to Germania and back home to Rome), but also to realisations about himself, about the Empire he has never questioned and a father whose amorality he has never admitted. Meanwhile, Cassia is on a different journey as she travels from slavery towards a literal and spiritual freedom among the wolf-people beyond the Wall. She has come home, for before her mother?s enslavement, this was her tribe; as a child, Cassia had been told the stories and beliefs of her people. Cassia and Marcus do not travel alone, for before they set off she had returned to Titus?s estate and daringly freed her younger brother, along with two other adult slaves. Dangers wait at every turn in the forests and settlements as they head North, from the Red Crests of the Roman army to a ferocious bear. Marcus is a brave and ingenious leader; his courage and spirit are well matched by Cassia.

For some readers, the adventure may well be enough with its many excitements; it invites that intense pleasure - young readers riding a headlong, twisting plot. There?s more on offer here, though, in the wary interplay between Cassia and Marcus. She senses that, despite their closeness - attraction even - there?s something not to be trusted in him. What that

is becomes clear as Landman shifts the focus of the narrative from Cassia to Marcus as he realises that just as Cassia freed her enslaved brother, he needs to rescue his sister from the abusive tyranny of their father in Rome. In that way ? almost unconsciously - he frees himself from the Roman values he now rejects as corrupt. He cannot do that without Cassia, he knows, and so their separate journeys must become one.

---

**Source URL (retrieved on Nov '18):** <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/224/childrens-books/reviews/beyond-the-wall>

**Links:**

[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/beyond-the-wall>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/224>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/geoff-fox>