



## The Brilliant & Forever

*Kevin MacNeil*

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## **The Brilliant & Forever** Kevin MacNeil

On an island like no other, the annual Brilliant & Forever festival is a much anticipated event; its participants a story away from either glory or infamy. This year, three best friends – two human, one alpaca – are chosen to compete, so victory is not only about reward.

The glitterati descends, the festival begins: thirteen performers, each have their own story to tell. Who will be chosen by the judges? Who will be chosen by the people?

This is a novel like no other; a whip-cracking, energetic, laugh-out-loud satire on what we value in culture, and in our lives. And yet, written with exquisite warmth and empathy, *The Brilliant & Forever* is also a moving exploration of integrity, friendship and belonging. It'll split your sides and break your heart.

## **The Brilliant & Forever Details**

Date : Published March 3rd 2016 by Polygon (first published 2016)

ISBN : 9781846973376

Author : Kevin MacNeil

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## From Reader Review The Brilliant & Forever for online ebook

### Gwen says

I find it hard to switch gears sometimes, when I've really enjoyed a book - and just having finished two wonderful non-fiction books on Buddhism, I wasn't sure I'd be able to do justice to The Brilliant & Forever. But I didn't have to worry. Not only does Buddhism form a very subtle background to the novel, which I loved, but it's just a fantastic book. You'll enjoy it especially if you've spent some time around book festivals, but even if you haven't, you'll enjoy the stories that the characters tell, and the story that MacNeil tells. I would say, rather than 'laugh out loud' funny (as it says on the cover), it's the better kind - the kind where you laugh to yourself, read the passage again, think about it a bit, and wish there was someone you knew reading the same book so you could say, Wasn't that brilliant?! Because well, sorry for the pun, but it is.

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### Stephen Hull says

A charming little book that somehow added up to less than the sum of its parts for me. A funny and surreal story around an annual literary competition on a remote island (clearly modelled on the Outer Hebrides, where the author is from) where humans and alpacas live, speak and write stories. The framework permits the author to incorporate a number of separate, unconnected pieces into the novel -- and just to signpost it, the first chapter is titled "If on a Summer's Night an Alpaca." As a big Italo Calvino fan, I appreciated the joke, but Calvino pulls it off with much more aplomb.

This is a nice read, but I can't help being a bit disappointed by it, as I'd had my expectations puffed up by a review in the Guardian, a review which, by the way I urge you to avoid, as it contains just enough spoiler to have seriously affected my reading of the book. In fact, that may be the reason for my disappointment. Why can't all professional reviewers get the idea that relating the plot or giving away details, however much you try to anonymise them, is not book reviewing?

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### Linda Rollins says

The story follows three friends – a man, a woman and an alpaca (yes, really). Along with a host of other characters, they live as part of an island community that thrives on writing. Everyone writes, including the alpacas. Every year the island hosts “The Brilliant & Forever Literary Competition”; an event that produces winners and losers (on so many levels). The story sticks with the three friends in the run up to the competition – into which they will all be entering.

That is essentially the main story, but in this crazy concoction of literary tools and toys we are also treated to several individual short stories (entries to The Brilliant & Forever competition) as well as an inspiring ‘what’s life all about’ theme with thought-provoking nuggets scattered all the way through.

It's a little madcap to say the least, hilariously funny in places. At the same time it's tragic and disturbing and distressing. I was laughing loudly throughout the first third of the book, holding my breath in anticipation as I frantically flipped pages through the middle and was sobbing before the end. It's a bit of mental weirdness that provokes all sorts of emotions and makes you think about your place in the universe.

It's a book that plays with language and doesn't stick to rules. It's a book that needs to be quoted from, talked about and read over and over again.

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### **Moira McPartlin says**

When I began this novel I thought it was going to be a bit weird - an island where every inhabitant was an aspiring author, a minority population of talking alpacas and a literary festival where the winner gets a publishing deal and the loser gets something much worse. Then after the first couple of chapters things started to resonate with me. At first I thought the book might be an analogy of the publishing industry where crime and celebrity have most focus even when the writing is bad. And then I thought, this could also be an analogy about society as a whole and the alpacas were representative of all minorities; pick any minority and the treatment of the alpacas fitted the bill. Whatever meaning the author intended takes nothing away from the joy of reading this unusual novel. All the short stories read at the festival were excellent and the author did a grand job of using different writing techniques to suit the different contestants. By the end of the book I was filled with admiration for the writing but felt a little depressed because my interpretation did not give me much hope other than the fact the main character found his true vocation. Maybe that is the message and I just need to keep searching for mine.

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### **Apryl Anderson says**

I'm shattered! This was an excellent read: I truly appreciate MacNeil's forays into writing short stories from the POV of each character. It seems that he had great fun with it, so it was fun to read...and troubling. Not to give spoilers, but I can't see that the story could've gone any other way, dammit.

P.S. I'll be watching for the Haiku-kuri (how'd he spell it?) book ;0°

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### **Craig says**

This wonderful book celebrates the power of great storytelling and its ability to bring people together. It's a real tonic - life affirming, warm, witty and overflowing with empathy, it tells the story of three friends on a small island who enter the annual literary festival. One of the friends happens to be a talking alpaca (a small llama) but don't let that prejudice you, he's cool. The book follows their hopes, dreams and aspirations in the run up to the storytelling competition and then we get the competition itself, which is almost like a collection of terrific little short stories within the book itself. The tone overall is light and the banter is razor sharp and funny, but there are also real moments of clarity and connection here where life is encapsulated in a way you never realised could be put into words. It really is superb writing. The author grew up on an island and he captures the quirks and foibles of island life brilliantly. Dramatic tension is provided by an endemic prejudice on the island towards talking alpacas (these are the times we live in alas) and there are huge consequences for both the winners and losers of the literary festival - there are poignant moments here too. But overall the book is worth ten times its weight in mindfulness and will give your headspace the rocket boost you didn't realise it needed.

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### **Bettie? says**

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016...>

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### **m j cooper says**

Fun and quirky read

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### **Anni says**

They say everyone has a book in them and that is certainly the case on this Scottish island where everyone is working on a story – including Archie the alpaca. A cross between metafiction, farce and tragicomedy, this surreal celebration of the art of writing is also a sharp satire on literary pretensions and the publishing industry. Give yourself a tonic, suspend disbelief - and immerse yourself in the wacky world of these endearing characters.

(A word of warning to the sensitive reader: you might want to spare yourself the tragic ending - it was too sad for me).

Reviewed for Whichbook.net

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### **Jason says**

I love a book i find hard to categorise and this fits the bill. Part social commentary, philosophy and short story anthology. I found this hard to put down and difficult to forget; a joy to read. Oh and it has talking alpacas. What's not to like.

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### **Breakaway Reviewers says**

Wacky, ridiculous, endearing and totally unique!

I must confess that when I first started this book I was pretty determined not to like it. After all, a remote Scottish island where people and alpacas live side by side and all compete in a writing festival; the Brilliant and Forever of the title!! A place where the unnamed male narrator, his female friend Macy (not his girlfriend!) and their alpaca friend Archie all propose to enter a story in this year's festival. Seriously?! Well actually, probably yes; Kevin MacNeil has written a wacky and endearing novel which challenges the reader to let go of preconceptions and to consider the values of our times albeit in a humorous guise.

The island is home to the native 'Blackhousers', the up and coming 'Whitehousers' and two tribes of alpacas. Archie is a southern alpaca living in the north and trying to move on from a difficult divorce.

Strange as it may seem, Archie is the most thoughtful and erudite of the three friends; his catchphrase is ‘It’s like a jazz thing you don’t get’; remember that, it is important later.

The first part of the book sets the scene and explores the friendship of our three ‘heroes’. The second part covers the festival and its aftermath. Both parts invite you in and immerse you in the story and in the closeness of a genuine friendship and the divisions of competition.

The festival requires the entrants to read aloud a piece which has previously been submitted to the organisers. Each piece will be judged by the Official judges and by the People’s choice. The festival entrants are mostly islanders including Archie the alpaca with one or two visitors; all are strikingly individual, weird even, but each story has something to say about the human (alpaca) condition.

The writing is sensitive and accomplished and there are some truly wonderful lines, for example: “We built this island on rock and roll. Except for the graveyard. We built that on death metal.”

Against all my expectations the Brilliant and Forever is Brilliant! Open your mind, read it and you will see why!

Pashtpaws

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review

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### **Bookhuw says**

Fairly Buddhist, and overly quirky.

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### **John Houston says**

Sorry this just didn't work for me. I did like the standard of the writing which portrayed some nifty penmanship, so I wouldn't mind giving Mr MacNeil another go another time- however I really struggled to get into the story at all. It was engaging at the start and I quite liked the concept of a remote Scottish island where people and alpacas- for goodness sake- live side by side. Once I could sense the direction it was heading though it felt like the author was just using it as a trojan horse (alpaca?) to throw together some short stories that he didn't know what to do with- which themselves took up half the book and were pretty meh. About 3/4 of the way through and it was too contrived for me and it was a relief to just have it finished - it wasn't particularly brilliant and felt like it was dragging on forever.

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### **Roisín says**

Loved it! Definitely one of the most original books I've ever read and beautifully put together. Did not expect the ending though, honestly thought I'd misunderstood but just shows this is not a predictable book at all! Left me feeling very introspective.

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## **Di says**

The Brilliant and Forever is the kind of book you will continue thinking about long after you have reached the final full stop. An imaginative commentary on humanity and inhumanity. Both bleak and funny, this novel is well worth reading.

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