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The Lastling

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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The West comes out of **The Lastling** pretty badly. Young Paris travels from her home in the States with her Uncle Franklin to the Himalayas where they are joined by the other members of the expedition. A rum lot of adventurers they are too: Gavin the ex-SAS man, Donald the gourmet, Renaud the French celebrity chef, and gun-toting, whisky-slugging Harriet. They comprise The Ultimate Diners' Club, seeking the sensations of hitherto untasted dishes. And if the pair of pink-headed ducks enjoyed by these grotesques in evening dress in their mountain camp are the world's last pink-headed ducks, so much the better. Against this decadence, Gross sets the culture of Shengo, an elderly Buddhist monk, and his young pupil Tahr. For them, the true pathway lies in stories, a gentle spirituality and a oneness with their environment. When Tahr, his master dead, walks into the midst of the expedition, the contrasting values are all too clear. So too, is the spoiled brat shallowness of Paris. The boy and the girl, and their different universes, are drawn together through the appearance of an orphaned yeh-teh, or Mountain Spirit. No Abominable Snowman this, but a subtle, intelligent creature capable not only of fashioning tools, but also of love, of grief and of sacrifice. This is a haunting, persuasive novel. Best to forget pedestrian objections (such as, why on earth would the satanic Uncle Franklin take his niece on such a trip, or how would American Paris think in terms of **Boy's Own** adventures?). Read the book rather as a parable or a myth; the escapade is *just* horrifically on this side of credibility and its violence, cruelty and greed are all too believable. The old monk talks of 'life on the edge' and all three civilisations which collide here - those of Paris, Tahr and the yeh-teh - are indeed on the edge. Young Paris may just have learned enough for her own salvation. For young readers, the questions which may linger as they close the book are all around them; on the street, on the News and in the papers, in the forests and the seas, and in the condition we humans have constructed for ourselves.

Running Order:

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