

## ***So Far Gone*, by Jess Walter**

### ***Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy***

Rhys Kinnick, the acerbic lead character of *So Far Gone*, Jess Walter's latest novel, is a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Everyman of sorts. Estranged from his family over differing political views, Kinnick has been living "off the grid" for seven years in a remote cabin deep in the North Pacific woods.

One afternoon, when two young kids turn up on Kinnick's crumbling front porch, he assumes they are selling candy or magazines. "We aren't selling anything," the boy said. "We're your grandchildren." Kinnick did not recognize Leah and Asher, now ages 13 and 9.

The family's discord began in November 2016 during Thanksgiving dinner at the home of Kinnick's daughter Bethany and her conspiracy-loving husband Shane. Kinnick, a retired environmental journalist, prides himself on being open-minded. While the family watched football on TV, however, Shane ranted about the "deep state" controlling the NFL. One thing led to another, a fight broke out, and Kinnick's self-imposed exile began.

Ditching his cell phone ("that \$600 pop-tart of modern science"), Kinnick cut off communication with his family and the outside world. Clearing out his apartment, he headed to his grandfather's abandoned 40-acre sheep ranch north of Spokane. After Kinnick fixed up the dilapidated cabin, he frittered away his time reading the "great works of philosophy, science, and literature," while fending off marauding raccoons.

The grandkids' surprise visit to Kinnick's wooded retreat caught him off guard. His daughter Bethany is not with her kids. Instead, Leah and Asher are standing there with Anna Gaines, a neighbor, who read a note from Bethany: "I had to leave in a hurry. I know that this is a lot to ask but can you take my kids to my father, Rhys Kinnick. He is a recluse who cut off contact with our family...."

Kinnick suspects that Bethany may have run off to join a commune. Settling the kids in the care of his friends, a Native American couple, Kinnick comes up with a plan to rescue his daughter. Accompanied by his ex-girlfriend and a discredited detective, he set off on a mad-cap road trip to Idaho.

*So Far Gone* is best enjoyed as a contemporary fable, laced with Jess Walter's satirical wit. Despite sporadic scenes of chaos, *So Far Gone* essentially is a story about a fractured family coming together. In the novel's preface, the author quotes Thoreau: "Not till we are lost...till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves."