

The background of the cover is a painting of a tropical beach at sunset. The sky is a vibrant mix of orange, yellow, and blue, with long, thin rays of light filtering through. Several palm trees are visible, their fronds silhouetted against the bright sky. In the foreground, a small wooden boat is on the water to the left, and a child is running on the sandy beach to the right. The overall mood is nostalgic and serene.

Saffire

A Novel

SIGMUND
BROUWER

AUTHOR OF *THIEF OF GLORY*

Praise for
Saffire

“Captivating! Emotional and impeccably researched. *Saffire* is a sweeping, early twentieth century novel with a colorful supporting cast and a main character who is both steadfast and strong. Brouwer weaves historical fact and storytelling with an expert pen—leaving the reader satisfied and, at times, in awe of the mystery and intrigue reminiscent of the classic *Casablanca*. I didn’t put it down until I turned the final page.”

—KRISTY CAMBRON, award-winning author of *The Ringmaster’s Wife*

Praise for
The Christy Award “Book of the Year 2015” *Thief of Glory*

“Emotionally riveting and exquisitely raw, *Thief of Glory* is an unforgettable tale about survival, not just of the body, but of the heart and soul, with an ending that will echo in your mind long after you’ve closed the book. Brouwer is a master storyteller.”

—SUSAN MEISSNER, author of *Secrets of a Charmed Life* and
Stars over Sunset Boulevard

“In *Thief of Glory* Sigmund Brouwer plunges readers into the mysterious embrace of the Dutch East Indies during the convulsions of the Second World War. Few authors have such an ability to immerse an audience in the sights, sounds, smells . . . and horrors! Brouwer makes you live it . . . sharing each moment of an exotic and terrifying time and place in a gripping, personal way.”

—BODIE AND BROCK THOENE, authors of *Take This Cup*

“Sigmund Brouwer’s *Thief of Glory* is a powerful story, richly told. Young Jeremiah Prins is a complex and fascinating hero, blessed with great gifts and challenged by choices to use them for good or evil. The details of life in a Japanese civilian prison camp are revealed in unflinching but compassionate realism, and the characters depict the human capacity for both great selfishness and great heroism. This is truly one of the best books I’ve read this year.”

—SARAH SUNDIN, award-winning author of *On Distant Shores*
and *In Perfect Time*

“I’ve been a fan of Sigmund Brower’s books for ages, but *Thief of Glory* cocooned me in rich words, vivid descriptions, and true-to-life characters, making this book hard to put down. A fan of World War II, I’ve read countless tales, but World War II in the Dutch Indies was new to me, fresh and heart-wrenching at the same time. A true glimpse of light amongst darkness, made even more special due to the inspiration of his own parents’ true story. *Thief of Glory* is going on my keeper shelf!”

—TRICIA GOYER, USA Today best-selling author of over forty
books, including *Chasing Mona Lisa*

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Saffire

BOOKS BY SIGMUND BROUWER

Thief of Glory
Broken Angel
The Canary List
Flight of Shadows
Evening Star
Silver Moon
Sun Dance
Thunder Voice
Double Helix
Blood Ties
The Weeping Chamber
The Leper
Out of the Shadows
Crown of Thorns
Lies of Saints
The Last Disciple
The Last Sacrifice
The Last Temple
Fuse of Armageddon

Merlin's Immortals

The Orphan King
Fortress of Mist
Martyr's Fire
Blades of Valor

Saffire

A Novel

SIGMUND
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This is a work of fiction. Apart from well-known people, events, and locales that figure into the narrative, all names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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*Ivan: Here's to more journeys together along the
road less traveled. Thanks for sending me to
Panama for this one.*





Sunday

January 10, 1909
Col. Geo. W Goethals,
Chairman, I.C.C.
Culebra, Canal Zone

Sir:

I have the honor to report concerning the members of the Police Department smoking while in full uniform and on actual duty.

My attention is attracted every day by this breach of discipline. For instance, yesterday, the 22nd inst. 1st-class Sergeant Carter, in command at Empire, while in full uniform with badge on, was walking up and down in front of the railroad station at that place smoking a cigar. Today, at railroad station at Gorgona, 1st-class policeman No. 42, while on active duty, was leaning against building with one hand in pocket smoking first cigarette and then a cigar.

At same time and place, Policeman No. 77, also on active duty at time, walks up with a cigarette in his mouth.

These are only a few instances. Most every day at some of the depots a policeman can be seen lounging against something or even sitting down smoking.

It is certainly not a military position to assume and if there is no rule in regard to this matter, it would look like they could be instructed along this same line.

I also noted for the past month, the train-guard of train numbers 6 and 7, has worked up quite a flirtation with a Mrs. Wilbur of Bohio, wife of a former policeman. On last Saturday, he assisted her train at Bohio and on


arriving at Colon, he immediately joined her after having reported to his station. On return trip, he sits with her the entire time on train entirely neglecting his duties. Today she again gets on train at that point and on arriving at Colon, takes a cab for Pier No. 11, Cristobal. He joins her there. On return trip he again sits with her and the conductor is obliged to hunt him to have an unruly passenger ejected.

These, while small matters, cause comment from bystanders and passengers, causing the police force, for lack of discipline in same, to be a subject for gossip.

Respectfully,

T. B. Miskimon

One

eporters called it Hell's Gorge, the world-famous Culebra Cut of the canal dig, in the American Zone of the Republic of Panama.

My view was from an observation deck, with a dozen tourists alongside me at the rails. Like the solitary woman walking on a path below us, they had stepped off the train with me.

Stairs from the top of the hill led down to the observation deck where I stood. The deck perched on the side of the dig, and a footpath, like a goat track, led away from the base of the stairs. The woman had been picking her way along, lifting her skirt slightly to keep the edges from getting soiled.

But . . . why was she down there alone?

Instead of admiring the sight of Hell's Gorge or speculating on some woman's actions, I should have been in the town on the ridge above, across

from the train station, at the main administration building. That's where I was to attend a meeting that had required weeks of travel, first on horseback from my ranch, through the Dakota Badlands, to the train stop in the closest town, Medora. Then nearly two thousand miles east by rail to New York, followed by a steamship a similar distance south to Colón, and finally rail again for a short journey south, across the isthmus to Culebra.

But this view of the dig would be my only sightseeing of the entire six-week journey, and only because I'd arrived early enough this Sunday morning for the indulgence.

If only my young daughter Winona could see what was in front of me. She would have been fascinated by the giant chasm filled with apparent chaos, at the shovel gangs and track gangs and surfacing gangs and dynamite gangs. Everywhere—on the floor of the man-made valley, on the sheer walls of cut rock, on the railroad tracks, and on the railroad cars—scrambled gangs of all nationalities, all dressed in the blue shirts and the khaki trousers that marked them as possessions of the Isthmus Canal Commission. Possessions of the man with absolute control over every aspect of it, an Army Corps engineer named Colonel George Washington Goethals.

If Winona were here, she would talk about it for days after. My daughter was nothing if not enthusiastic. I could have been like many of those on the observation deck with me, using a folding pocket Kodak or a Brownie to take photographs to show her, but I had neither. But then, Winona loved to read, so I would write a wonderful description in my journal and read it to her when I returned home. As usual, I would enjoy our conversation, for her quick mind would spur her to ask about details until she could see it as clearly as I did now.

Perhaps if her mother were alive, I wouldn't worry so about her. But it was just the two of us. And no job, no request awaiting me in the administration building, would keep me from her for one more day than neces-

sary. I would do what I came here to do, refuse the offer, and immediately head back to Colón to board a steamer to begin my journey home—

I frowned. Something was wrong. No, not wrong . . .

Missing. The constant noise that had assaulted my ears was gone. Silence had fallen upon the gorge. Drills ceased thumping and workers scurried to a collection area. The observation deck had to be a safe place to witness why the workers had begun to scurry, otherwise it wouldn't be here. Was I the only one to understand the cessation of work and the movement of workers as something significant?

Apparently so, for those around me scarcely paused in their discourse.

I turned my attention back to the woman who had ventured onto the hillside below and to my right. "Ma'am," I called, "I'd suggest you hurry back up here."

She did not respond.

I set my valise on the floor of the deck and moved to the base of the stairs, raising my voice.

"Ma'am, can you hear me?"

On top of the hill, a strong constant breeze from the Pacific up to the Continental Divide whistled through the canopies of the palm trees. While the patterned bark trunks and notched broad leaves were new to me, wind was wind, something that seemed to have a life of its own. I had grown up with long grasses that rippled to the horizon, wind that rustled the leaves of cottonwoods, flashing the pale underparts of leaves like minnows scurrying from a heron.

No, the wind hadn't sent me from the top of the chasm down here into the Culebra Cut. Rather, it was the fact that down here I was away from the gaggles of tourists with the dangerous points of their careless parasols, nattering like geese out of range of a defeated coyote.

The tourists had come, even this early in the morning, because this, the acclaimed seventh wonder of the world, drew them from every point on the globe. They clogged hotels and restaurants at the anchor ports of

Panama City and Colón on each end of the Canal Zone, these tourists determined to send postcards as markers of pride. It was said that the only accomplishment that might ever be more wondrous than connecting the oceans would be a flight to the moon, and since that was impossible, the digging of the canal would be the pinnacle of human marvel.

But I had regretted my descent into the cut almost immediately. On the observation deck, it seemed like I'd dropped into Hades. Another hundred yards past the woman, the dig had exposed pyrite on the hillside. Tropical sun and moist atmosphere exacerbated the oxidation process, heating a narrow patch of ground the length of dozens of railcars. Blue smoke, rotten with the smell of sulfur dioxide, rose from fractures, adding to the haze of heavy clouds of soft coal dust that hung over all the machinery.

The woman, it seemed, wanted to get closer to the pyrite out of curiosity or idle boredom, both dangerous prospects.

"Ma'am!"

I did not like where I was. It had taken my exile years to appreciate that I preferred the solitude of canyons and mud flats where rivers cut through badlands. Horses were my choice, not machines. And yet here, stretched as far as I could see in both directions along the chasm, were the biggest machines in the world. Modern miracles. Steam shovels with buckets capable of filling a flatbed train with two scoops. Beginning at the top, these monstrosities had cut a widening gap, turning each of the opposing sides of the valley into sets of massive steps, with a series of parallel tracks on each level, the flatcars supplicant for their loads of dirt, ready to follow the belching locomotives.

I missed the soft haunting sounds of coyotes and owls and mourning doves, the snort of a startled deer. Before Sharps shooters had massacred the buffalo, the thunder of moving herds might have been an apt comparison to the deep rumble of the steam shovels below me, but now the screech of steel wheels against steel tracks was like bone grating against

bone, and the hillside shrieked in protest as the steam shovels tore at its flesh. House-sized boulders tumbled into the shallow black water collecting at the lowest point of the cut.

Intense tropical heat induced the sweat that soaked my shirt and hatband. I missed my arid badlands.

A few hundred yards away, the woman kept picking her way toward the burning ground and the blue sulfurous smoke. What was she seeking? A souvenir?

I took a half step. Perhaps I should chase after her. Then, as my front foot touched down, it came.

A rock-heaving blast of epic proportions.

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