



Blacklands: A Novel

By Belinda Bauer

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EIGHTEEN YEARS AGO, Billy Peters disappeared. Everyone in town believes Billy was murdered—after all, serial killer Arnold Avery later admitted killing six other children and burying them on the same desolate moor that surrounds their small English village. Only Billy's mother is convinced he is alive. She still stands lonely guard at the front window of her home, waiting for her son to return, while her remaining family fragments around her.

But her twelve-year-old grandson Steven is determined to heal the cracks that gape between his nan, his mother, his brother, and himself. Steven desperately wants to bring his family closure, and if that means personally finding his uncle's corpse, he'll do it.

Spending his spare time digging holes all over the moor in the hope of turning up a body is a long shot, but at least it gives his life purpose.

Then at school, when the lesson turns to letter writing, Steven has a flash of inspiration . . . Careful to hide his identity, he secretly pens a letter to Avery in jail asking for help in finding the body of "W.P."—William "Billy" Peters.

So begins a dangerous cat-and-mouse game.

Just as Steven tries to use Avery to pinpoint the gravesite, so Avery misdirects and teases his mysterious correspondent in order to relive his heinous crimes. And when Avery finally realizes that the letters he's receiving are from a twelve-year-old boy, suddenly *his* life has purpose too.

Although his is *far* more dangerous . . .

Blacklands is a taut and chillingly brilliant debut that signals the arrival of a bright new voice in psychological suspense.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

British author Bauer's solid debut focuses on Steven Lamb, an unhappy 12-year-old boy who lives with his mother, grandmother, and five-year-old brother in Shipcolt, Somerset. Steven's grandmother is still haunted by the disappearance and suspected murder of her 11-year-old son, Billy, 19 years earlier. The authorities assume Billy was killed by pedophile Arnold Avery, who was convicted of six counts of murder and is serving a life sentence in Longmoor prison. Determined to find Billy's remains, Steven has been methodically digging up the moor near his house. Frustrated by his lack of progress, he writes a letter to Avery asking for information, and so begins a cat-and-mouse game that will have dire consequences. Bauer creates believable tension within the Lamb household as her characters shoulder enormous psychological burdens, though a somewhat far-fetched climax dilutes the quiet power of the preceding story. (*Jan.*) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Bauer, whose intent was to write a “small story about a boy and his grandmother,” didn’t quite succeed. Yes, there’s a grandmother and her 12-year-old grandson, but Bauer’s debut is hardly a “small” (read simple and uncomplicated) story. It’s an unsettling novel, with the sort of devastating emotional content that makes it both difficult to read and difficult to forget. Steven Lamb wants nothing more than to find the body of his uncle, taken as young boy (and presumably murdered) by pedophile Arnold Avery, who is now in prison. It’s Steven’s desperate wish that by finding the body, he’ll heal his dysfunctional family and repair his grandmother’s broken heart. Digging holes in the nearby moor (the blacklands), where many of Avery’s victims were found, has revealed nothing, leaving the pedophile himself as Steven’s only hope for ending his family’s pain. Thus begins a carefully orchestrated mail correspondence—just a few words here and there—passed between the two in letters that the recipients must puzzle out. Unfortunately for Steven, Avery quickly gains control of the conversation, which allows him to live in glorious memory of his killings. If the turn of events isn’t totally unexpected, it’s a riveting journey nonetheless, with Bauer remaining fully invested in her troubled characters: one a clever, vicious manipulator; the other an unappreciated, bullied 12-year-old, desperate for love. --Stephanie Zvirin

Review

“*Blacklands* is leading the pack of profound new mysteries. . . . Atmospheric bewitching a brilliant analysis of an exceedingly twisted mind.”

—*Chicago Tribune*

“Bauer’s ability to shift between the perspective of a 12-year-old boy and a middle-age serial killer is brilliant and frightening all at once. . . . [her] debut novel promises to be the first of many good reads.”

—*The Post and Courier* (Charleston, SC)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Wendy Lambert:

Book is to be different for each and every grade. Book for children until eventually adult are different content. As we know that book is very important usually. The book *Blacklands: A Novel* ended up being

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Robert Vargas:

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