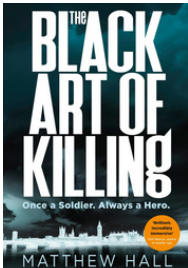


#AdventureSociety

Book Club talk sheets

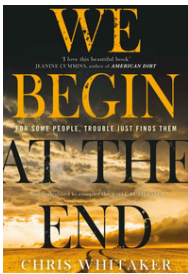
or download the individual talk sheets from our website

Contents



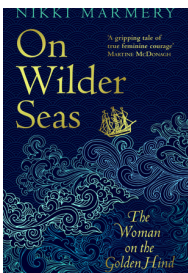
The Black Art of Killing by Matthew Hall

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We Begin at the End by Chris Whitaker

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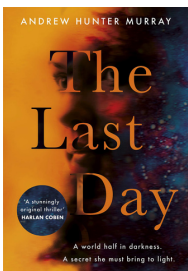
On Wilder Seas by Nikki Marmery

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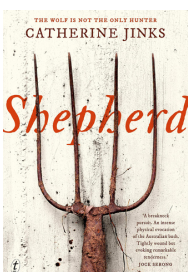
Black Sun by Owen Matthews

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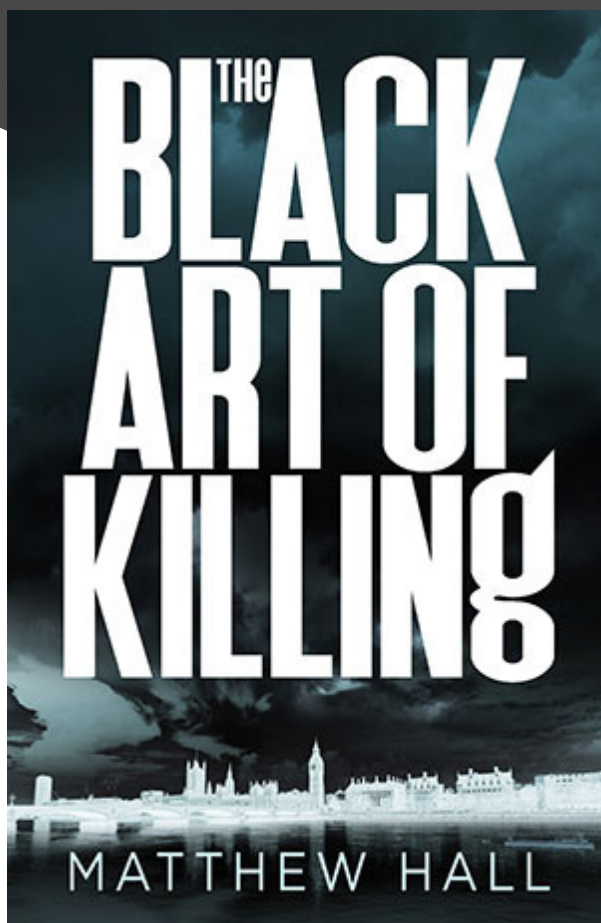
The Last Day by Andrew Hunter Murray

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Shepherd by Catherine Jinks

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Michael Joseph, 2020

About the Author

Matthew Hall lives on the border of England and Wales.

Matthew was educated at Hereford Cathedral School and Worcester College, Oxford. He graduated in law and, after several years as a barrister in London, began his writing career with episodes of the hit ITV show, *Kavanagh QC*. Matthew has now written over 60 hours of prime-time UK drama. His first original series, *Wing and a Prayer*, was nominated for a BAFTA and he has won several awards including a BAFTA Cymru in 2018 for *Keeping Faith*.

His debut novel, *The Coroner*, was shortlisted for the Crime Writers' Association Gold Dagger in 2009 as was his fourth novel, *The Flight*, in 2012. His passions outside writing are the conservation of the countryside and amateur boxing.

The Black Art of Killing by Matthew Hall

About the Book

Oxford University has never employed a man like Leo Black before.

Now an adored lecturer destined for tenure among the gleaming spires, Leo Black served the SAS for twenty years with distinction.

When the friend he fought alongside is killed in Paris trying to prevent the abduction of a young British scientist, the world Leo has tried to put behind him begins to reel him back in. But as Leo gets closer to the startling truth about his friend's death, he faces a difficult decision.

Forget the training, the loyalty, the service and be the man the university wants him to be... Or remember that not so long ago, he was a truly exceptional soldier.

Other books by the author

Visit www.matthewhallbooks.com/novels.html for a list of Matthew Hall's Jenny Cooper, *The Coroner*, series.

Discussion points

- The author, Matthew Hall, is an experienced screenwriter. Do you think this has influenced his writing style? How so?
- What did you think of the central character, Leo Black? Did he seem realistic?
- What elements of the novel make it an adventure story?
- Leo Black bridges two very different worlds: the SAS and Oxford University. How does he manage the different worlds and their interactions?
- How does your opinion of Colonel Freddy Towers change as the novel progresses?
- How does the author convey a mounting sense of unease and tension throughout the novel?
- Leo Black goes on a journey across the world. Do each of the locations feel true-to-life? What techniques does the author use to transport you?

Suggested further reading

Firefly by Henry Porter

The Constant Gardener by John Le Carré

Camino Island by John Grisham

The Long Call by Ann Cleeves

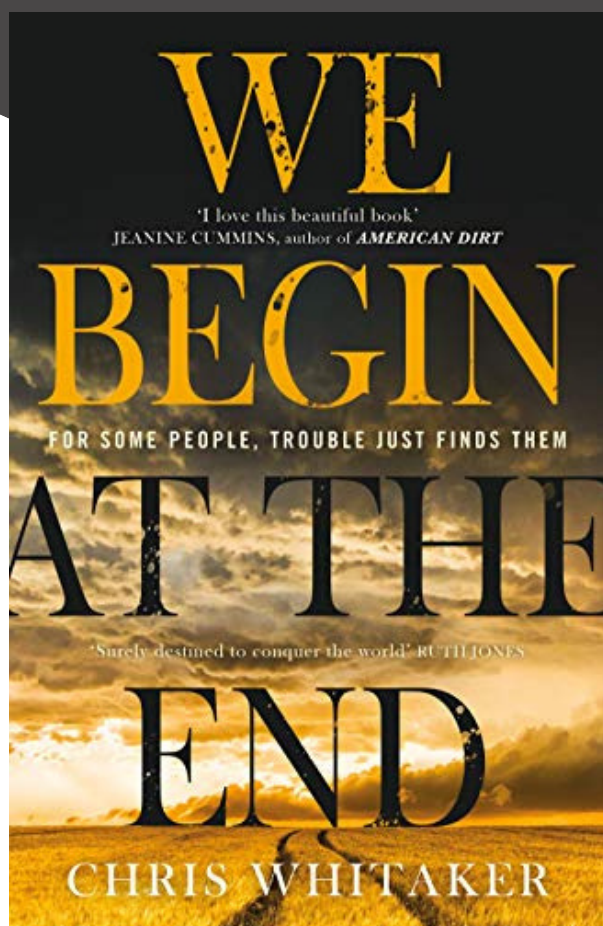
Useful Links

Matthew Hall's website: www.matthewhallbooks.com

The Independent article by Matthew Hall: [Why I abandoned my successful TV scriptwriting career](#)

Daily Express article: [The real SAS are...](#)

[The Wilbur & Niso Smith Foundation](#)



Zaffre, 2020

About the Author

Chris Whitaker was born in London and spent ten years working as a financial trader in the city.

He now lives in Hertfordshire with his wife and two young sons.

His debut novel, *Tall Oaks*, won the CWA John Creasey New Blood Dagger. Chris's second novel, *All The Wicked Girls*, was published in August 2017. *We Begin at the End*, his third, was published in March 2020.

Other books by the author

Tall Oaks
All The Wicked Girls

We Begin at the End by *Chris Whitaker*

About the Book

'You can't save someone that doesn't want to be saved...'

Thirty years ago, Vincent King became a killer.

Now, he's been released from prison and is back in his hometown of Cape Haven, California. Not everyone is pleased to see him. Like Star Radley, his ex-girlfriend, and sister of the girl he killed.

Duchess Radley, Star's thirteen-year-old daughter, is part-carer, part-protector to her younger brother, Robin - and to her deeply troubled mother. But in trying to protect Star, Duchess inadvertently sets off a chain of events that will have tragic consequences not only for her family, but also the whole town.

Murder, revenge, retribution.

Discussion points

- What elements of the novel make it an adventure story? What other genres could it be?
- Cuddy, the prison warden, and Walk, the police chief, discuss morality and how close people can come to crossing the line between 'right and wrong'. Do you think there is a line that once crossed, you can't return?
- Star Radley describes Police Chief Walk, as "all good". Do you think he, or anyone, can be "all good"?
- What do you think the most important traits in a friend would be to Duchess Day Radley? Why?
- Does your opinion of the characters change throughout the book? Discuss Walk, Vincent King and Hal, in particular.
- Author Chris Whitaker has had no 'formal writing training' but has been a reader his whole life. What do you think it is that makes someone a 'good writer'?
- Although British, each of Chris Whitaker's novels are set in the USA. Do you think *We Begin at the End* would still work if set in a different country?

Suggested further reading

To Kill a Mocking Bird by Harper Lee

Dodgers by Bill Beverly

Redemption Road by John Hart

The Dry by Jane Harper

The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger

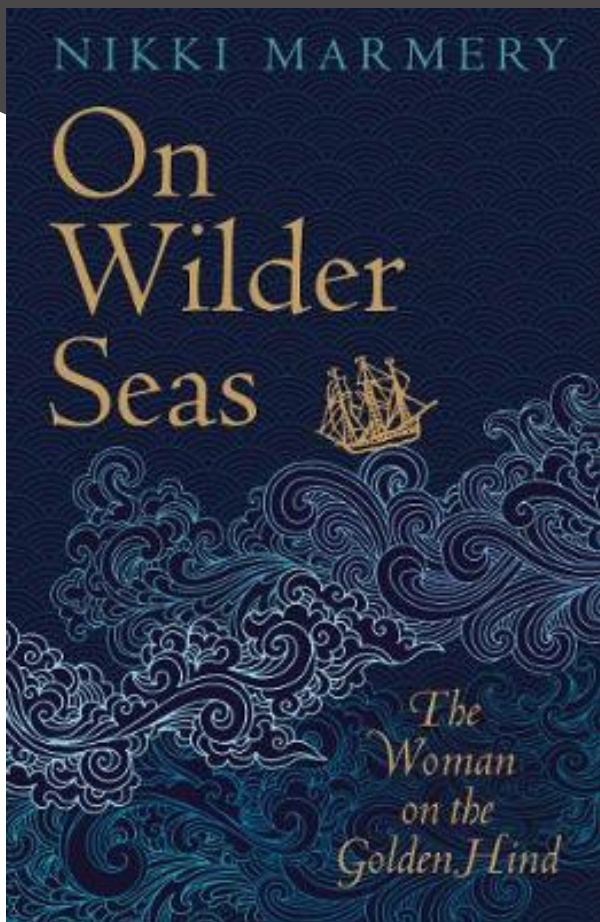
Useful Links

Compulsive Readers: [A Quickie with Chris Whitaker...](#)

An Interview with Chris Whitaker in the Bishop's Stortford Independent: [Award-winning crime write happy to...](#)

Follow Chris on twitter: [@WhittyAuthor](#)

[The Wilbur & Niso Smith Foundation](#)



Legend Press, 2020

About the Author

Nikki worked as a financial journalist for 15 years. The financial crisis, followed swiftly by the arrival of three small children, put an end to that, and she now lives in the countryside, where she writes historical fiction and watches Gardeners World unironically.

On Wilder Seas follows the voyage of Francis Drake's Golden Hind from the perspective of the only woman on board. Earlier drafts were shortlisted for the Myriad Editions First Drafts Competition 2017 and the Historical Novel Society's New Novel Award 2018.

Nikki has a degree in history from the University of Nottingham and studied creative writing at the Faber Academy. Her interests are prehistory, feminism and feminist prehistory.

On Wilder Seas by *Nikki Marmery*

About the Book

April 1579: When two ships meet off the Pacific coast of New Spain, an enslaved woman seizes the chance to escape.

But Maria has unwittingly joined Francis Drake's circumnavigation voyage and he's about to set sail on a secret detour to find the fabled Anian Straits in the far north.

Sailing into danger, fog and ice on the Golden Hind, a lone woman among eighty men, Maria will be tested to the very limits of her endurance. It will take all her wits to survive and courage to cut the ties that bind her to Drake to pursue her own journey.

How far will Maria go to be truly free?

Inspired by a true story, this is the tale of one woman's uncharted voyage of survival.

Other books by the author

This is the author's debut. Find out more about Nikki at: www.nikkimarmery.com

Discussion points

- The book is based on Sir Francis Drake's circumnavigation voyage on the Golden Hind, although the author calls it a 'possible life' of Maria rather than a history. Do you enjoy books related to real events? Why?
- What trait do you think the central character, Maria, values above all?
- The author's descriptions of the places explored are detailed and vivid. Do you think she has accurately captured New Spain (Mexico) and the Western coast of the Americas? In this novel, Nova Albion is set in the Canadian Arctic.
- Marmery conveys life onboard ship for an extended time. Discuss how you would feel to not touch or see land for months, or even years at a time. Do you think the sailors become institutionalised?
- Religion plays a key role in the men's lives, many believing themselves fervent Christians. Yet many of them still commit violence too frequently. Discuss how robbery, rape and enslavement is treated in the novel.
- How do the different groups interact with each other, in particular the crew and the indigenous people they meet?

Suggested further reading

The Strange Adventures of H by Sarah Burton

The Bedlam Stacks by Natasha Pulley

Under a Pole Star by Stef Penney

The Hornblower Series by C.S. Forester

The North Water by Ian McGuire

Master and Commander by Patrick O'Brian

Useful Links

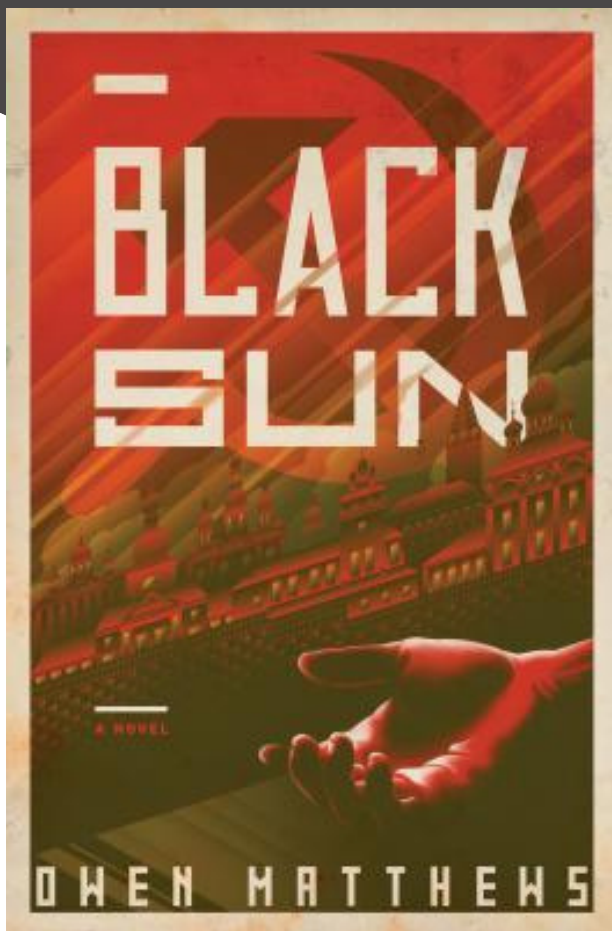
Visit the locations in *On Wilder Seas*: [A BookTrail across Wilder Seas with Nikki Marmery](#).

Listen to Nikki talk about *On Wilder Seas*: [Talking Tudors with Nikki Marmery](#).

Historia, the Historical Writers' Association magazine: [Maria: the African woman who...](#)

Follow Nikki on twitter: [@nikkimarmery](#).

[The Wilbur & Niso Smith Foundation](#)



Doubleday, PRH 2019

About the Author

Owen Matthews was born in London in 1971. He studied Modern History at Oxford University before beginning his career as a freelance journalist in Bosnia. His stories have appeared in a number of publications including the *Spectator*, *Private Eye*, *The Times* and the *Telegraph*. From 1995 to 1997 he worked at *The Moscow Times*, a daily English-language newspaper in Moscow, with forays into Lebanon and Afghanistan.

In 1997 Owen became a correspondent for *Newsweek* magazine, covering the second Chechen war as well as Russian politics and society. From 2001 to 2006 he was based in Istanbul, covering the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq and from 2006 – 14 he was *Newsweek's* Moscow bureau chief.

Matthews has lectured on Russian history and politics at Columbia University, Oxford University, and Moscow State University.

Black Sun by Owen Matthews

About the Book

It is the dawn of the 1960s. In order to investigate the gruesome death of a brilliant, young physicist, KGB officer Major Alexander Vasin must leave Moscow for Arzamas-16, a top-secret research city that does not appear on any map.

There he comes up against the brightest, most cut-throat brain-trust in Russia who, on the orders of Nikita Khrushchev himself, are building the largest nuclear bomb ever created. RDS-220 is a project of such vital national importance that, unlike everyone else in the Soviet Union, the scientists of Arzamas-16 are free to think and act, live and love as they wish... as long as they complete the project, and build the most powerful nuclear device ever known.

Other books by the author

Black Sun is the author's first novel. He has also written the following memoirs, non-fiction and biographies:

Stalin's Children: Three Generations of Love and War; Glorious Misadventures; Thinking with the Blood; and An Impeccable Spy: Richard Sorge, Stalin's Master Agent

Discussion points

- How effectively do you think the author blends the vital scientific understanding with the story itself?
- Arzamas-16 is a secret city where residents had many privileges (access to books and literature, fully-stocked fridges and modern apartments) that the general population of the Soviet Union could not access. Why was this case? Discuss.
- This city of privilege is an alien world to Alexander Vasin. How do you think it would feel to suddenly see people living in a more luxurious way than yourself? Discuss how he navigates the city.
- Maria Adamova declares, "When you live with wolves, you howl like a wolf." What do you think this means? Do you think she still believes it in relation to her present life?
- The author has created a piece of fiction from a basis of historical fact. Do you think the story is believable? Which parts do you think are pure fiction?
- What are your thoughts on the book's structure? Could you guess the ending before it happened? Would you choose a different ending for any of the characters?

Suggested further reading

Gorky Park by Martin Cruz Smith

Red Sparrow by Jason Matthews

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy by John le Carré

Witchfinder by Andrew Williams

March Violets by Phillip Kerr

The Hunt for Red October by Tom Clancy

Useful Links

Listen to Owen talk about his book *The Impeccable Spy*: [Travels Through Time podcast](#)

Guardian First Book Award: [An Interview with shortlisted author Owen Matthews](#)

The Strand Magazine: [Five things that foreign writers get wrong when they write about Russia](#)

Follow Owen on twitter: [@owenmatth](#)

[The Wilbur & Niso Smith Foundation](#)



Hutchinson, 2020

About the Author

Andrew Hunter Murray is a writer from London. For ten years, Andrew has been one of the writers and researchers behind the BBC show *QI*. He is one of the co-hosts of *QI*'s spin-off podcast, *No Such Thing As A Fish*, which since 2014 has released 250 episodes, been downloaded 200 million times, and toured the world. It has also spawned three books, and a BBC2 series, *No Such Thing As The News*.

Andrew also writes jokes and journalism for *Private Eye* magazine, and hosts the Eye's in-house podcast, *Page 94*. In his spare time he performs in the award-winning comedy show *Austentatious*, which plays in London's West End and around the UK. His first novel, *The Last Day*, is a high-concept thriller set in a world whose rotation has slowed to a halt.

The Last Day by *Andrew Hunter Murray*

About the Book

A world half in darkness. A secret she must bring to light.

2059. The world has stopped turning.

One half suffers an endless frozen night; the other, nothing but burning sun.

Only in a slim twilight region between them can life survive.

In an isolationist Britain, scientist Ellen Hopper receives a letter from a dying man.

It contains a powerful and dangerous secret.

One that those in power will kill to conceal...

Other books by the author

This is the author's debut novel. Andrew is also an author on *The Book of the Year* series and the *QI Book of General Ignorance* series.

Discussion points

- Which parts of the book stood out for you? Were there any parts you thought unique, out-of-place, thought-provoking, or disturbing?
- If you had to trade places with one character, who would it be and why?
- The author has built a detailed picture of the world in *The Last Day* and threaded the story through it. In his writing, did you prefer the action or the description? Do you have any favourite passages?
- What would you say are the main themes of the book? What points do you think the author was trying to make?
- What are your thoughts on the book's structure? Did it serve the story well?
- Did you guess the ending? If so, at what point? Would you have chosen a different ending for any of the characters?

Suggested further reading

Children of Men by P. D. James

The Gone-Away World by Nick Harkaway

Fatherland by Robert Harris

The Wall by John Lanchester

Station 11 by Emily St John Mandel

For younger readers: *The Wind Singer* by William Nicholson

Useful Links

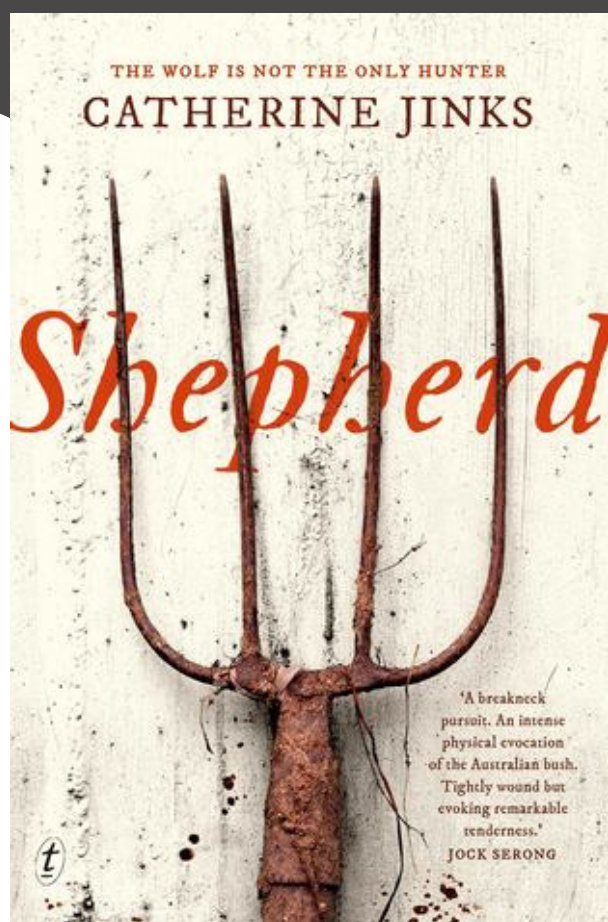
Listen to Andrew talk about *The Last Day* on: [Simon Mayo's Book of the Year podcast](#)

Thejournal.ie article by Andrew : [Britain has pride about not succumbing to...](#)

Book Review on Sparkly Pretty Bright: [The Last Day by Andrew Hunter Murray](#)

Follow Andrew on twitter: [@andrewhunterm](#)

[The Wilbur & Niso Smith Foundation](#)



Text Publishing, 2019

About the Author

Catherine Jinks was born in Brisbane, Australia in 1963. She grew up in Papua New Guinea and later studied medieval history at the University of Sydney. She is now a full-time writer, residing in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales with Peter and their daughter Hannah.

Catherine is a four-time winner of the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year award, and has also won a Victorian Premier's Literature Award, the Adelaide Festival Award for Literature, the Ena Noel Award for Children's Literature and an Aurealis Award for Science Fiction. In 2001 she was presented with a Centenary Medal for her contribution to Australian Children's Literature.

Shepherd

by

Catherine Jinks

About the Book

Tom Clay was a poacher back in Suffolk. He was twelve when he was caught, tried and transported to New South Wales.

Now, assigned to a shepherd's hut out west, he is a boy among violent men. He keeps his counsel and watches over the sheep; he steers clear of blowhards like the new man, Rowdy Cavanagh. He is alert to danger, knowing he is a foreigner here – that the land resists his understanding.

The question is: how fast can he learn? Because a vicious killer named Dan Carver is coming for Tom and Rowdy. And if Tom can't outwit Carver in the bush – and convince Rowdy to keep his stupid mouth shut – their deaths will be swift and cruel.

Other books by the author

Visit <http://catherinejinks.com/books-2/> for other books by the author

Discussion points

- What does the cover tell you about *Shepherd*?
- What elements of the novel make it into an adventure story?
- How important is the relationship between Tom Clay and his sheepdog, Gyp? What does it represent to Tom?
- Would you say Tom is a sympathetic hero? Why, or why not?
- Dan Carver is as villainous and determined as they come. Discuss the violence he employs in the novel. How did you react to the graphic scenes as a reader? Did the same scenes stand out to your fellow readers? What would you imagine it is like to write this?
- How does your opinion of Rowdy Cavanagh change as the novel progresses?
- How does the author conjure up the environment of the bush in the 1840s? Do you think it would be any different today?

Suggested further reading

Preservation by Jock Serong

Half Moon Lake by Kirsten Alexander

The Making of Martin Sparrow by Peter Cochrane

The Escape Room by Megan Goldin

Blood in the Dust by Bill Swiggs

Useful Links

Catherine Jinks' website: www.catherinejinks.com

Australian Metro article by Catherine Jinks: [Land of Risks and Rewards](#)

Australian Book Review: [review of Shepherd](#)

[The Wilbur & Niso Smith Foundation](#)