

The Dry



Author Background

Born: Manchester, UK

Raised: Boronia, Victoria and Hampshire, UK

Lives: St Kilda, Melbourne

Jane Harper was born in Manchester in the UK, and moved to Australia with her family at age eight. She spent six years in Boronia, Victoria, and during that time gained Australian citizenship.

Returning to the UK with her family as a teenager, Harper lived in Hampshire before studying English and History at the University of Kent in Canterbury. On graduating, she completed a journalism entry qualification and got her first reporting job as a trainee on the *Darlington & Stockton Times* in County Durham.

Harper worked for several years as a senior news journalist for the *Hull Daily Mail*, before moving back to Australia in 2008. She worked first on the *Geelong Advertiser*, and in 2011 took up a role with the *Herald Sun* in Melbourne.

In 2014, Harper submitted a short story which was one of 12 chosen for the *Big Issue's* annual Fiction Edition. That inspired her to pursue creative writing more seriously, and that year she applied for an online 12-week novel writing course. She was accepted with a submission for the book that would become *The Dry*.

Harper lives in St Kilda with her husband and daughter.

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Book Summary

WHO REALLY KILLED THE HADLER FAMILY?

It hasn't rained in Kiewarra for two years. Tensions in the farming community become unbearable when three members of the Hadler family are discovered shot to death on their property. Everyone assumes Luke Hadler committed suicide after slaughtering his wife and six-year-old son.

Federal Police investigator Aaron Falk returns to his hometown for the funerals and is unwillingly drawn into the investigation. As suspicion spreads through the town, Falk is forced to confront the community that rejected him twenty years earlier. Because Falk and his childhood friend Luke Hadler shared a secret, one which Luke's death threatens to unearth ...

PRAISE FOR *THE DRY*

"Devastating debut ... a suspenseful tale of sound and fury" *Publishers Weekly*

"A nail-biting thriller ... this fine debut will keep readers on edge and awake long past bedtime." *Kirkus*

"Every so often a debut novel arrives that is so tightly woven and compelling it seems the work of a novelist in her prime. That's what Jane Harper has given us with *The Dry*" John Hart, *New York Times*, bestselling author of *Redemption Road*

"It's extremely rare and exciting to read a debut that enthralls from the very first page and then absolutely sticks the landing." C.J. Box, #1 *New York Times*, bestselling author of *Off The Grid*

Source: Publishers website Pan Macmillan

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Discussion Questions

1. Luke and Gretchen both keep the secret about their whereabouts on the day Ellie died, even from Falk, but for different reasons. How does the keeping of this secret affect their relationship with each other and with Falk? How does it impact the way the truth comes out about Ellie's death?
2. Why do you think Gretchen is so reluctant to tell Falk who Lachie's real father is? Who do you think it is?
3. Jamie Sullivan's secret needlessly hinders the investigation into the Hadlers' deaths, and yet his fears about what people in a small town might do if they found out about his homosexuality are understandable. Similarly, Ellie Deacon keeps the secret of her father's abuse, with tragic consequences. What does this tell us about the nature of secrets, and the need for truth? Is it better for some secrets to be kept?
4. *'Why couldn't he let her in? Why wouldn't he let her in? Did he not trust her? Or did he not love her enough?'* Falk's adult relationships have not been what he hoped. How have the events surrounding Ellie's death, and his relationship with Ellie in life, affected Falk and his ability to engage with people?
5. Do you think that leaving town was the right way for Falk's father Erik to deal with the situation he and his son were facing? How did his father's doubts about him affect Falk?

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Discussion Questions (continued)

6. Harper has chosen to tell this story in the past tense third person, from Aaron Falk's point of view, with flashbacks from various characters threaded throughout. What is the effect of this? How does it shape the reader's understanding of Falk himself, as well as of the other characters in the novel?
7. The drought overshadows everything that happens in *The Dry*. In some ways it could almost be said to be a character in its own right. What is it about the drought and its effects on the town that make people less likely to question what happened to the Hadlers?
8. The novel has a strong sense of place, despite being set in a fictional town. What elements does Harper include to accomplish this? How do the bush, the rock tree, the river, effect the story?
9. Falk describes his group of friends as *"teenage tight, where you believe your friends are soulmates and the bonds will last forever."* And yet he later wonders why he and Luke were still friends. Did the early bonds last? Were the bonds broken because of their personalities, because they grew apart, or because of the lies they told?

Just for fun

10. Did you find the ending satisfying, or are you hoping for more resolution at the beginning of the next book? Are you planning to read the next book?

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Reviews

Every now and then an Australian crime novel comes along to stop your breath and haunt your dreams. *The Broken Shore* by Peter Temple was one, *Bitter Wash Road* by Garry Disher another. Both are books that capture something profound about the Australian landscape and the people who inhabit it. Both are not just great crime fiction, but great Australian novels. *The Dry* by Jane Harper is another. There is about *The Dry* something mythic and valiant. This is a story about heroism, the sins of the past, and the struggle to atone. But let's not forget the redbacks, the huntsmen, the rabbit scourge and all that makes this a quintessential Australian story beautifully told.

Sue Turnbull, *Sydney Morning Herald*

Jane Harper's *The Dry* is set in a parched Australian farming community within a day's drive of Melbourne. It's a region that hasn't seen rain in two years, and the novel's main character, Aaron Falk, is jolted to see that a rushing river he remembers from his youth has all but disappeared. Ms. Harper is not one to drop a fact like that without using it later. She has jampacked her swift debut thriller with sneaky moves that the reader has to track with care.

Ms. Harper throws out so many teasing possibilities that it's hard to believe this is her first novel. And even harder to believe that she learned to write fiction via a literary agency's online writing course. (She had already been a print journalist for more than a decade.)

In addition to its constant recovery of forgotten facts and little clues, *The Dry* skips along on frequent changes of focus. Ms. Harper's energy is so unrestrainable that she tears off in a new direction every time Falk or Raco begins seeing the case from some previously unconsidered point of view. What if the reinterpretation of a single word changes everything?

Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*

Continued overleaf

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Reviews (continued)

Parched and crackling after a two-year drought, the Australian town of Kiewarra is the highly combustible setting for Jane Harper's first novel *The Dry*. Nature isn't the only thing that's dangerous in this small town in the middle of nowhere....

Solid storytelling that, despite a plethora of flashbacks, never loses momentum, strong characterisation and a sense of place so vivid that you can almost feel the blistering heat add up to a remarkably assured debut.

Laura Wilson, *The Guardian Australia*

There is something very particular about the isolation of the Australian outback, despite its beauty it also has a real menace. It is this which Joan Lindsay tapped into with the classic *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and it was also that which Barbara Baynton channelled in *Bush Studies*. Utterly different to both those books, *The Dry* nonetheless continues this outback horror tradition. Without rain, Kiewarra is a community in crisis and with bush fires on maximum alert, a lit match is more deadly than a loaded gun. Yet somehow, the concept of the family annihilator does feel like a very modern thing – the white middle-class male who flips and wipes out his family, while neighbours spout platitudes about how he had seemed so nice and that they never suspected a thing. There is an unease in how Luke Hadler's parents stand at his funeral and talk about how much he loved his family – a local woman scolds Aaron for loyalty to his erstwhile best friend, calling what has happened not an act of a desperate man but rather the worst kind of domestic abuse. Harper seems to be acknowledging that there is something a little uncomfortable in looking for excuses – but is this case as simple as it appears?

Girl with her head in a book [blog]