



## Land of the Blind

*Jess Walter*

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## **Land of the Blind** Jess Walter

In this fiendishly clever and darkly funny novel, Jess Walter speaks deeply to the bonds and compromises we make as children -- and the fatal errors we can make at any moment in our lives.

While working the weekend night shift, Caroline Mabry, a weary Spokane police detective, encounters a seemingly unstable but charming derelict. "I'd like to confess," he proclaims. But he insists on writing out his confession in longhand. In the forty-eight hours that follow, the stranger admits to not just a crime, but an entire life: a wry and haunting tale of poverty and politics, of obsession and revenge. And as he writes, Caroline pushes herself to near collapse, racing against the clock to investigate not merely a murder, but the story of two men's darkly intertwined lives.

## **Land of the Blind Details**

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Author : Jess Walter

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## From Reader Review Land of the Blind for online ebook

### Tom LA says

I love Jess Walter, as I said in other reviews I believe he is a notch above most other contemporary writers. Here is a great comment about "Land of the Blind" by the author himself:

"I wanted to write a darkly comic and suspenseful coming-of-age crime novel about politics, philosophy, the tech bubble, and the way people drag their teenage selves through the rest of our lives. And like a beginning juggler who has tentatively tossed an apple, a chainsaw, and two bowling pins in the air, and is now reaching for a saber and a football, I decided that my confessional novel would be structured like a mystery, only in reverse - starting not with a body, but a killer - and that it would be a sequel to my first book."

The plot opens in a very intriguing way: while working the weekend night shift, Caroline Mabry, a weary Spokane police detective, encounters a seemingly unstable but charming derelict who tells her, "I'd like to confess." But he insists on writing out his statement in longhand. In the forty-eight hours that follow, the stranger confesses to not just a crime but an entire life—spinning a wry and haunting tale of youth and adulthood, of obsession and revenge, and of two men's intertwined lives.

"Land of the blind" is an original novel, just like any other novel written by Jess Walter (I've now read them all except for "The Zero"). It's original in its structure, because for being a crime novel, it doesn't show you any body or murder until the very end. It's original in the fact that it's written in a very literary style, often verging on the poetic. I read some other crime fiction recently (Dark Places), defined as "literary crime fiction" by the editor, but there was a huge difference: where "Dark places" is "literary" in a formal sense, with an above-average use of terminology, analogies and metaphors, but overall pretty cold, "Land of the blind" is "literary" in a deeper sense: the style is much warmer, intimate and personal, and where "Dark places" is pretty shallow, "Land of the blind" carried a deeper meaning.

So deep and personal, in fact, that there's no way to ignore the fact the the mysterious protagonist, Clark, has a glass eye, and Mr Jess Walter (the author) does too. And difficult to ignore the intimate reference to the famous "Monoculus rex est in terra coecorum" quote, or "The one-eyed man is a king in the land of the blind", where the book's title comes from. Walter blends fiction with his own experience of living through high-school years in Spokane, and the result is so realistic it's creepy, as it reminds you of the silent tragedies we all lived through in the turbulent years of our adolescence.

Another Jess Walter trademark is to put so many elements in his novels, so disparate from each other that you think it's going to be a whole mess, but then somehow he's able to make them gel and ultimately pull it off. As he said in the quote above: an apple, a chainsaw, a saber, a bowling pin.... but somehow, it all fits together well.

As always, Walter pours his whole heart out on the page. He is clearly using language to put on the page his deep feelings, rather than (like other authors sometimes do) starting from language and using it as a mean to induce feelings in the reader. That's why his books often feels inspired, almost like reading poetry. Here's a paraphrase I liked:

"We never learn anything. Our lives circle back around endlessly, presenting us with the same problems so we can make the same mistakes. We pretend we are moving forward but we live on a globe rotating on an axis, orbiting a burning sphere that is itself orbiting with a million other round hot stones. In a universe of circles, movement is just the illusion that comes from spinning, like a carousel - the faster it spins, the faster the world moves around it".

But then, despite this being one of the darker and more melancholic of his novels (sometimes infused with real, raw sadness), there is still a lot of Walter's sense of humor, that was a delightful discovery for me in "Beautiful Ruins" and "The financial lives of the poets".

And Walter's hometown, Spokane, with its gloom and hopelessness, is - as always - not only background to the story but an integral part of the novel: "... looked out the window at the glittering skyline of Spokane. I've always thought it a strange city that way: a city of illusion, at night its downtown big and sparkling, but during the day small and decaying, with big gaps between the buildings. At night, you can imagine great things here. But daytime in Spokane is cold and real".

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### **Denny says**

Jess Walter has accomplished something rare with *Land of the Blind*. He has followed up his stellar debut detective novel, *Over Tumbled Graves* with an equally stellar sequel told in an entirely different way. While *OTG* was a straightforward, 3rd-person omniscient literary thriller with loads of hardcore detective work and all the other conventions of the genre, *LotB* was more of an epistolary novel, telling the story of the crimes, committed or only conceived, through a series of handwritten confessions and a bare minimum of half-hearted investigation on the part of world-weary, disillusioned, beaten-down detective Caroline Mabry. This second and apparently final book in the series turns almost all the conventions of the crime fiction genre on their heads to startling effect. At its conclusion, I found myself wishing there were more in the series, but it appears Walter has, at least for now, put Detective Mabry's gun & badge in the bottom drawer. I'll be moving on to *Citizen Vince* and beyond soon, but Mr. Walter, if you ever happen across this review, hear my prayer: Make the Caroline Mabry mysteries a trilogy, and let us see where she ends up 15 or 20 years down the road, whether she's still with the police or doing something else. Your writing blew me away, and I fell in love with Caroline Mabry. My life won't be complete 'til her story is fully told.

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### **Suzanne says**

*Land of the Blind* was not a fun read. Clark, the main character reveals in tortuous detail his adolescence. Walter's characters always seem to come from the seamy side of Spokane. He writes with so much pathos and detail, it can't all be imagined pain.

Clark begins this novel confessing to crimes, real and unnamed. He suffers as he unloads the pain of success, failure, loyalty, treason, love and detachment. His patch does not blind him. It only gives a lack of depth perception.

As I said, this was not fun. It shows Walters mastery. He is able to provide a picture of modern entanglements in an old fashioned hero. Clark is Jimmy Stewart with a sad heart.

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### **Patrick McCoy says**

*Land Of The Blind* has some interesting aspects to it, but it is not as satisfying as Jess Walter's debut, *Over Tumbled Graves* or his subsequent novel, *Citizen Vince*. A lot of the premise was too on the nose-too obviously taken from the headlines: dot com bubble frauds, local political races. Other aspects were too over the top, Clark becoming a millionaire and the utter helplessness and afflictions of Eli. It has the makings of a compelling mystery, but the execution seemed somewhat marred by inauthentic details piling up. However, I liked the set pieces about Clark and Eli's youth-growing up in the East Valley on the other side of Division

on Empire in Spokane. I also liked the use of the historic Davenport Hotel as a story location. I liked some of the observations Walter makes about the east-west divide of the state and Seattle vs. Spokane. In particular he says that Spokanites don't trust anyone who left town but thinks everyone that stayed must be too stupid to get out.

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### **Paul says**

Not my favorite by Mr. Walter, but an excellent read none-the-less. This is a follow-up to his novel Over Tumbled Graves and as different from that one as night is to day. Basically they both share a main character; otherwise the tale and the way it's told are nothing alike.

Spokane is once again a focus. It reminds me sometimes of the area in which I grew up near Beaumont, Texas. Another mid-sized town in a 50 year recession, full of hopeless optimism and a never-ending supply of excuses for failure. There is much made of the ever present past from childhood that follows you into life from wherever you came, but especially when you come from a place like this.

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### **Eric Hammel says**

I write books for a living. I edit books. I publish books. I =live= books. But I rarely find myself impressed by books.

I'm impressed enough with Jess Walter to read his books. Now I find myself impressed enough with Land of the Blind to get off my jaded butt to recommend it to anyone who was ever teased in school, or bullied, or humiliated, or moved by the fear of any of the above to act against his better nature.

This is a book written in pain; it is painful to read, painful to relive personal moments like the moments it churns back into the light. Beyond being a work of beauty wrought from words, it is a book of truth wrought from memories of pain.

If you were ever, for just one moment, a schoolkid in over your head, with repressed memories of the you you'd rather not face, here's that rare opportunity to take it out, to examine it, to tell you that it wasn't as bad as it seemed.

Land of the Blind is a lifetime's worth of truth-telling therapy for about the price of lunch.

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### **Book Madness (Elif) says**

Öncelikle kitap ?imdiki zaman kipinde anlat?lm??. Yani geliyor, gidiyor vb. Beni bu tarz anlat?mlar inan?lmaz s?k?yor ve okumas? bir i?kenceye dönü?üyor.

Kitab?n ba??nda katil belli ve polise gidip cinayetini itiraf etmek istiyor. Ba?l?yor yazmaya. Yaz?yor da yaz?yor.

Kitap daha iyi i?lenmi? olsa asl?nda sevdirebilirdi kendini. ?u durumda bana sadece i?kence oldu. Bitmek bilmedi. ?

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## Scotty Cameron says

Jess Walter does it again. I know this was written well before *The Financial Lives of the Poets*, but I read them out of order. But this, like *Financial Lives*, is a book that I must recommend.

This book tells the life story of Clark Anthony Mason, an aspiring politician, hack-job lawyer, people pleaser, and identity-challenged individual. Clark goes to the police, namely Caroline Mabry, wanting to confess. He doesn't know how to go about it. Finally, he decides on confessing to murder through a longhand written statement that ends up being, well, this novel. Part of the novel is Clark's written statement, and part is Caroline reacting to this seemingly crazy confessor and what she digs up on him within the forty-eight hour period in which Clark is writing.

At first, I was a little turned off by the mystery-crime-solving-thriller vibe that the interrogation style gave off, but, after a couple of perspective changing sections, I was hooked. At the end of one of the present day sections, I was dying to know what Caroline would do or discover next. Then, at the end of Clark's story sections, I was enthralled by the story; naturally, I wanted to know what happened next. This style of writing I think was sort of like a cliff hanger setup, but it was far less artificially-construed interest. That is, the story was strong enough to keep the interest rather than cliffhangers for the sake of making the reader turn the page.

This book, all things said and done, was great. I struggled with accepting the ending, but after a while, I decided that any other way of ending the novel would have either catered to a more run of the mill audience who is happy with their feel-good sitcoms, or it would have left me hating Jess Walter for doing terrible things to characters he made me love. There is plenty of ambivalence about whether or not we should like/love/hate any certain amount of characters. I think that's really one of the most enjoyable aspects of Jess Walter's writing, particularly in *Land of the Blind*.

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## Steve says

It's a goal of mine to scare up votes for Jess Walter's induction into the Pantheon of Great American Storytellers. *Land of the Blind* justifies his nomination. [*Citizen Vince* (see review) does even more so.] He's never slow, he adds insights without overdoing it, his dialogue is bang on, and his plots keep Kindle screens refreshing incessantly. I like his style, too – kind of edgy, but with a genuine regard for his characters. If you were to shoehorn this one into a category, I guess it would be a police procedural, but in no way do you need to be a fan of the genre to enjoy it.

Clark Mason was found high up on the ledge of an abandoned hotel with too much on his mind. He's in need of some grooming, and he's wearing an eye patch, but police detective Caroline Mabry is oddly attracted – this despite being pegged as a “loon” in her diacritical taxonomy. He tells her he has something to confess. But this is not your typical kind of here's-the-crime/here's-how-I-did-it admission. In fact, he's vague about what of the act was even criminal. He sells it as a story of a bad thing that happened for which his own culpability was key. To appreciate the guilt, he said, you had to understand the context. Caroline took the bait and soon became the Father confessor. It was a protracted statement that they decided he should write out himself. He fills multiple legal pads over multiple days. In the meantime, Caroline digs up what she can of Clark's background and recent woes. It's quite a story. And the context *is* important.

The book has two storytellers. Clark, with his first-person account beginning in grade school, was one; and an omniscient narrator, with the focus on Caroline's investigation, was the other. Clark's chronological telling is where we first encounter Eli, a complete social misfit with clumsiness, smelliness, and bad skin just

the tip of the iceberg in his ostracized existence. Both he and Clark suffered at the hand of the neighborhood bully, but came out of it differently. Much of the rest of the tale involves their interactions and separate fortunes. I won't reveal anything, but I will say that both are very interesting in a real-life, human kind of way. Clark's self-awareness allows us to empathize. The independent assessments that Caroline digs up from people who knew him at various stages round out our view.

I'm going to hold back one star because it was ever so slightly clichéd and ever so slightly implausible. To the latter point, I had trouble accepting that Clark's written output could be so comprehensive and polished all in a weekend's time. Then again, maybe the fact that it was so good should be celebrated for the enjoyment it brings, however implausibly. The other reason I'm stingy with the extra star is that *Citizen Vince*, a book I liked even more, needs a one-better rating. Still, this one was much the same: memorable characters, great writing, and a real attention grabber.

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## **aPriL does feral sometimes says**

The book is tough going in the first half because the subject is bullying and it is harsh to read.

Eli is an extremely bullied kid because he has everything wrong with him that can be wrong with someone and yet be fit enough for public school mainstreaming while still needing two special-ed classes as well - he smells, he wears ugly glasses, he's both physically and mentally handicapped, and he lives in a spiritless deadened large town. Clark, one of the narrators, is also bullied, but not as bad. They both catch a school bus at the same spot with a larger, older kid who unfortunately, while obviously destined for a state prison soon, during this time period leads a group of children in the manner of a wolf pack hunting down the weakest animals in the neighborhood.

Being an honest, if fictional, story, this leads to choices which scar the young boys. They grow up, but they never really recover from their childhood. Being able to see reality in a fully complete picture is difficult for them when the boys become men. Clark and Eli are unable to see past their childhood humiliation, and, in Clark's case, he has the additional burden of his shameful capitulation to the bully and his betrayal of Eli, who Clark knows was an innocent victim.

Eli wants desperately to escape his limitations, but cannot. He is the symbolic metaphor at the center of the book.

Clark's self-loathing blocks his seeing how people currently admire him, and that leads him into blind alleys and dead-end streets while chasing meaningful adult fulfillment. Clark is an empty man inside. He can't stop trying to fill the interior void despite possessing self-awareness of the rear-view mirror sort. He has myopia for any close reading of his life. He realizes eventually he might have a single chance left to be happy, and the realization forces Clark into embracing his dark side. He sets up a murder.

In my opinion, the character Caroline weakens the plot. She is the investigating detective, but as one of the two narrating characters she is incomplete, in my opinion. She is burned out, which is a common factor between Clark and herself, but her attraction to Clark doesn't make sense to me. We readers get fleshed-out histories of Eli, Clark, Dana and Susan, but Caroline is only a platform for the story to be told, and she is not interesting as written. I think her motive in helping Clark, perhaps, might be part of her need at this point in her life to help the unlucky who get caught like hapless deer in headlights, but I'm guessing that is what is supposed to be motivating her. Her disaffection with her life is very deep - I can't see why Clark would engage her sympathy. She is emptied out, but Clark had never filled in - he is a hollow man. Incomplete as a

character as she is, it makes more sense that she'd be attracted to substance, not a child-man. Just saying.

Both Clark and Caroline need validation from helping society through public service, and both feel they have failed to make headway in their goals. However, Caroline is a successful cop until she no longer cares; Clark is a lawyer leaning on charisma and a 'love me please' neediness, never rising much above the passing grade.

I think this is an almost literary book, but it falls short. it's not really a mystery, either, but it kinda walks in spitting distance of those genres.

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### **Dan says**

Another excellent story from Jess Walter.. becoming one of my favorite authors. He knows how to spin an exciting tale for sure. The story begins with a murder confession, no body or identity, and the rest unspools from there!

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### **John Addiego says**

Jess Walter is such a pleasure to read! I've been going through his novels kind of in reverse order. This was one of his first, and it mixes crime and literary fiction in a unique way. As with his others, there are moments of excruciatingly hilarious and painful depictions of how we behave in our youth or in love or under the influence of other inflammatory factors. This especially resonates with how it feels to survive childhood among bullies and pecking orders: the terror and humiliation, the fascinating ways we cope. There's also lots about ambition and sex and the dot com bubble, and no better writing about Spokane than I've ever seen.

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### **Rick (from Another Book Vlog) says**

In *Land of the Blind*, Jess Walter has written a dolorous thriller about a man who wants police detective Caroline Mabry to witness his confession to a crime that has yet to be reported. With legal paper in hand, Clark Mason proceeds to write a long story of a childhood friendship gone horribly wrong—a "story of weakness, not of strength"—one in which he alternately befriends and betrays oddball Eli Boyle.

Years later, Eli agrees to let Clark turn his recreational, hobby-like fantasy game, Empire, into a computer game. Eli also bankrolls Clark's attempt at Congress. But when the techno boom busts and Clark's platform runs out of steam, Eli enacts a final, horrifying revenge on those who made his childhood a living hell, including the woman Clark has been in love with since grade school.

The strength of *Land of the Blind* is its theme: that the scars of childhood often last our entire lives. They shape us, as adults, in ways we never fully understand. Clark's physical scars are evident—including the eye he lost as a child. Full of allusions to sight and vision, the book shows us that emotional scars are far more debilitating and every bit as permanent.

Clark's honest portrayal of his life—one laced with poignancy—comes from a gutsy clarity that comes from a person with nothing left to lose. For all his flaws, Clark remains sympathetic, thanks to his relentless attachment to Eli Boyle and Jess Walter's enthralling script. Somehow, Walter is able to transform a book about life's failure to deliver on the promises of youth into a book you can't possibly put down.

I highly recommend *Land of the Blind*, especially those who were teased in school, or humiliated, or moved by the fear of any of the above to act against their better nature.

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### Lorraine says

In a serendipitous manner, “Land of the Blind” landed in my purview, and I’m glad it did. It is considered a mystery or detective story, but it is actually a first-rate novel. Since I have been exposed to Jess Walter, I plan to read his 2012 novel “Beautiful Ruins,” which Maureen Corrigan (NPR) called a “literary miracle.”

I love women detectives and Caroline Mabry, a single 37-year old, was the perfect choice. She has been demoted to the swig shift in a Spokane police station where drunks and derelicts end up. A strange man with a patch on one eye, whom they refer to initially as the Loon, comes into the station and declares “I want to confess.” Caroline thinks he looks familiar, but cannot place him. She has no idea what he wants to confess, so she gives him a legal pad and tells him to write his confession down. While he spends two days writing his confession, and fills many legal pads, Caroline begins an investigation trying to figure out what he wants to confess, whether someone has really been murdered, and how the people he introduces in his confession fit into the picture.

The story is told from two perspectives: Caroline’s and the Loon, who we discover is Clark Mason. It turns out that his crime is more of a plea to be forgiven for all the things he did which were accidental against people he loved. Clark is burdened with his past and has never really let go of it. Someone has died, but who is responsible? Has a murder really been committed? That’s the question we ask ourselves throughout the novel. Caroline’s story is as emotional as Clark’s. There is a bond there that is both witty and sad. The ending is original and surprising. Walter is an author worth reading. He is talented and creative.

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### Catherine says

Most sequels are similar in style to their predecessor, but *Land of the Blind* is stylistically very different from *Over Tumbled Graves*. I don't know if Walter's book deal at that point was dependent on this second novel being a sequel, but it seems to me that's not what he wanted to write and the novel suffers a bit from stretching to be a detective mystery involving Caroline Mabry.

I really liked Caroline in *OTG*, where she was a central figure. Here she's just hanging on to the periphery of the novel, just as she's barely hanging on to her job. She does have one scene of bad-guy-asskicking that shows some of her former glory, but mostly she's just a shadow, running around trying to figure out what crime could have been committed by her suspect. One thing that is consistent is that Caroline's romantic attractions make absolutely no sense to me. Serious WTF territory.

The heart of the novel is a handwritten (thank you, Jess Walter, for not using some hokey faux-handwriting font) "confession" from Clark, a failed politician, bankrupt both financially and morally, who after being picked up for trespassing at a hotel undergoing remodeling, says he wants to confess to a murder, but only under Caroline's watch. His is a story of growing up poor, of being bullied, and of rising above all that through sheer determination, only to falter time after time. His story is intertwined with that of Eli, alternately the focus of his rage and pity, the person he claims to have killed.

Walter is becoming one of my favorite writers and he excels when writing in Clark's voice. Overall, I'd rate

this novel 3.5 stars, rounding up because the parts that are good are very, very good.

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