



## Badlands: A Novel

*C.J. Box*

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In C.J. Box's *New York Times* bestseller, *Badlands*, the town of Grimstad used to be a place people came from but were never headed to. Now it's the oil capital of North Dakota. With oil comes money, with money comes drugs, and with drugs come the dirtiest criminals Grimstad's new deputy sheriff Cassie Dewell has ever encountered...

Twelve-year-old Kyle Westergaard dreams of getting out of Grimstad and leading a better life. Even though Kyle has been written off as a "slow" kid, he has dreams deeper than anyone can imagine. One day, while delivering newspapers, he witnesses a car accident and takes a mysterious bundle from the scene. Suddenly he's in possession of a lot of money—and packets of white powder—and Kyle can't help but wonder whether his luck has changed...for better or for worse.

**"Suspenseful—you can't put it down."**—*Library Journal*

When the temperature drops to 30 below and a gang war heats up, it's up to Cassie to help restore law and order. But is she in over her head? As she is propelled on a collision course with a murderous enemy, she finds that the key to it all might come in the most unlikely form: a boy on a bike named Kyle. He keeps showing up where he doesn't belong. And he seems to know something that Cassie does not about what lies beneath the surface of this small and troubled town...

**"The unrelenting cold makes this the perfect beach read."**—*Kirkus Reviews*

## Badlands: A Novel Details

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Author : C.J. Box

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## From Reader Review Badlands: A Novel for online ebook

### **Minty McBunny says**

Okay wait, wait, wait! If you are thinking of reading this "standalone" novel, stop right now.

It is not a standalone. It is also the THIRD book in a series. So you need to go back and first read Back Of Beyond which is Cody Hoyt #1, then read The Highway which is Cody Hoyt #2 but also Cassie Dewell #1.

I know, it's confusing. But do it. The Highway is, in my opinion, the weakest of the three due to Box getting lazy & recycling characters from the first book, putting the same two young girls in the path of a completely different and unrelated killer in the space of a year instead of creating new characters for us to care about.

That said, it's still a good story and a necessary step to understand several aspects of this novel as well as future books in this series.

Once you have those two read, come back to this one. It's a great story and a real departure from the first two books, and I mean that in a positive way. In spite of the connections to the prior books, I forgot a few times that I was reading a C.J. Box book. His voice as a female protagonist and the unusual setting of this story made it a refreshing stand out from all his other books (I have read most of them).

I thought everything progressed at a good pace, the situations and mystery were done in a realistic but entertaining way and Kyle was a touching and engaging young hero. I am very excited about the turn this series has taken and look forward to following it wherever it heads next!

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### **Rex Fuller says**

It's hard to imagine a better written book. Lean sentences. Story first, last, and always. Really, really impressed with this.

Cassie Dewell, who we met in Box's "The Highway," where she first battled the Lizard King, the long-haul trucker serial killer, confronts him again. She then leaves Helena, Montana's, sheriff's department for a fictional Grimstad (note the play on words), North Dakota, which resembles oil-booming, ice cold Williston. She lands smack in the middle of a drug turf war between a biker gang and MS-13. Kyle Westergaard, a twelve year-old paper boy found a drug courier's load of cash and meth and took it home to help his formerly alcoholic, drug-addicted Mom. Her boyfriend finds it and immediately – thinking he is clever – starts a play that will inevitably bring on the traffickers' assassins. Cassie's new job with the Grimstad Sheriff's puts her in the sights of the deputies who're on the drug lords' payroll. Box masterfully shows us what the boy, Kyle, does. And, we learn there will be at least one more encounter with the Lizard King.

One of the few I've read within a twenty four hour period. You just can't not like it.

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### **Edward says**

While entertaining, there was a lot that I didn't like about this book. A good 20% of the story is tied up with a backstory from the first book in the series, or so I assume, and there is pretty much no progress of that storyline anyway. At the end of the book it is revealed that the trucker murderer gets away because Cassie was insufficiently injured to get an assault charge to stick. I don't expect writers to be legal experts, but this is a pretty major mistake. Assault doesn't require injury in the first place, and given that the event was recorded there would be ample evidence to show that he committed assault.

Now we get to the main story. One of the first rules in detective fiction is that the crime cannot be solved by chance, you can't just stumble upon the solution 50 pages from the end of the book. Unfortunately Box forgot this rule and it made the story a tad unbelievable. I could understand if Cassie had a chance encounter with Kyle just the once, but three times is a bit much. That said, the story was exciting for most of it, which is why I'm giving this two stars instead of one.

My last complaint comes down to the overall feel of the book. There are three things which just rubbed me the wrong way. First, all of the characters are a little bit sexist. Given the setting we might not find this all too surprising, given that the story mainly takes place in a small town in North Carolina and a small oil town in North Dakota. Box could have turned this into a commentary on the sexist culture of police forces and of oil workers, etc. But instead he brushed it off as something women should be flattered about. He justifies the sexism of the other characters by saying that deep down Cassie actually likes it.

Second, Box found it necessary to comment on the ethics of oil drilling, which wasn't necessary for the plot and simply made him look bad. A mystery novel is not the place to make political statements.

Third, maybe it was just because of the last two points, but it also felt like the baddies were chosen as a kind of political statement as well. The local drug dealers, although still criminals, were seen as relatively harmless. The troubles only started when those damn foreigners started coming to town.

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### **Ed says**

Outstanding crime fiction in the Arctic winter weather of Grimstad, North Dakota. Grimstad is ground zero in an explosive oil boom and as it's new Chief Investigator, Cassie Dewell gets busy investigating crooked deputies and a missing shipment of meth by the MS-13 gang. Author C J Box builds the third installment of "The Highway Quartet" into a modern, fast moving western thriller with richly drawn characters in a world of compellingly entertaining prose you'll long remember. It's now on to the 4th book in the Highway Quartet "Paradise Valley". Joe Picket who?

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### **Dan Biermeier says**

This was my first CJ Box novel, it will NOT be my last.

The pace was great, writing crisp and the characters well defined.

It's a hard cruel world in the new North Dakota where Oil Fracking has caused a boom in money, drugs and murder.

The new detective from Montana is in for a number of shocks while the boy with a bit of mental and speech disability has already seen and heard it all at a very young age.

The story follows the detective as she works her way through the evidence and the young boy as he continues to plan his dream escape, down the Missouri River to the great Mississippi and beyond.

If you like stories that involve the innocence of kids mixed up in the big old crazy adult world, try this one. You're bound to like *Kyle*.

Watch out for violence, dirty cops, drug use and a very cold winter. That's just how North Dakota flows in these new days of the Bakken Oil Rush.

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### **Terry Odell says**

As always, Box delivers good writing, good imagery, and a good story. I wasn't as caught up in the characters as I wished I would have been, although I did like the sheriff and the way he ran his department. Cassie was fine, just not "quite" the character I'd want to spend as much time with as Joe Pickett and Nate.

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### **Alex Cantone says**

Two vehicles race along the icy highway outside Grimstad, North Dakota, oil capital of the new Wild West. One car is forced off the road where it flips, overturning several times, trapping the driver. The second car drives off as a police patrol vehicle appears, followed by a second which "calls in" a single vehicle accident.

The scene is witnessed by twelve-year old *Kyle Westergaard*, undersized for his age and with a speech impediment due to fetal alcohol syndrome. He was delivering newspapers on his pushbike through the snow and stopped off at a bluff to survey the flames from the ducts of the fracking wells. Though dismissed as simple, *Kyle* has a dream of cruising his friend's boat down the Missouri River to its confluence with the Mississippi and down to the Gulf. He collects items for this journey from rubbish skips and stoops to retrieve a package flung from the overturned vehicle from the snow, placing it in his pannier to take home. It is found by his mother's feckless boyfriend, *T-Lock*, who opens it and sees an opportunity...

*Cassie Dewell* arrives in Grimstad from Helena, Montana, appointed Chief Investigator to Sheriff *Kirkbride* who suspects corruption within his department. She has a reputation as an uncompromising detective, and her mother and young son are to join her there. She soon discovers that not everyone welcomes her, particularly her predecessor, sent back out on patrol.

*"My mother will be in for a shock, that's for sure. She's a vegan and she's into sustainable and organic."*  
*"Whatever that is," Kirkbride said, taking a long pull of his beer. "She's in for a culture shock."*

The title "Badlands" relates to the rock formations, twelve miles east of the border with Montana, but is also a euphemism for a small farming community overwhelmed by oil workers living in "Man Camps". And big money attracts drugs, prostitutes and criminals.

With temperatures dropping to thirty-below, body parts appear around town, identified by tattoos as a man

starting a chapter of the “Sons of Freedom”. The disappearance of others suggests the town is witnessing a gang war, with the vicious Hispanic MS-13 (Mara Salvatrucha) muscling in from California.

The strength of CJ Box’s writing is in the characters: from law enforcement turning a blind eye to minor felonies to focus on major crime, to the gangs, to people living on the fringes of society. There is no glamour at play here, only hard work, greed and bloodshed. A mighty read.

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### **Kenneth Barber says**

Cassie Dewell has just relocated to Grimstad, North Dakota. She has a new job as chief investigator for the police department. Grimstad is booming due to oil fracking and the town is booming. Along with the oil also comes drugs and crime. When a small boy with fetal alcohol syndrome sees a wreck and finds a bag full of money and drugs his whole world is turned upside down. Cassie must solve the crime and save the boy, while finding corruption in the police department. Enjoyed the read.

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### **Thomas says**

I enjoyed reading this library book and I am counting it for North Dakota in my US state challenge. This book is more of a thriller than a mystery, in that the bad guys are revealed early on. The suspense builds as they start killing people, while they look for a missing bag of drugs worth over a million dollars. The key to the missing drugs is a 12 year old boy who is mentally challenged, due to fetal alcohol syndrome. This book 2 in the Cassie Dewell series, but it read ok as a stand alone.

Cassie is a single mother, widow of a soldier killed in Afghanistan. She has quit her job in Montana to take a better job in N. Dakota. She is now the Chief Investigator for the Bakken County, ND, Sheriff's Dept. The Sheriff warns her that there could be corrupt deputies in his department and she must only report to him. This book takes place during a bitter N. Dakota winter where temperatures drop to minus 20 or 30 overnight and don't get above freezing(32F) in the daytime. A good book to read in the hot summer. I read it in 3 days, finding it hard to put down about half way through.

I thought the characters were believable and the plot moved along briskly. I liked the ending. There is a plot line that sets up book 3 in the series. I plan to read more of this series.

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### **Michael says**

I liked this a lot, but time will tell if Detective Cassie Dewell proves as engaging a character as Box’s Joe Pickett as the hero of the author’s terrific series of 15 books featuring a Wyoming game warden. An overweight single mother with an aging, kibitzing mother, Cassie leaves her position in Helena, Montana, for a post with the sheriff’s department in an oil-boom town over the line into North Dakota. The sleepy town has undergone recent unprecedeted growth and now is the site of a gang war over the drug business, with police corruption an inevitable factor given the money at play. Cassie barely gets a chance to move before a series of brutal murders begins, and it’s a catch-up ballgame that kept me on the edge throughout. I love the way her mind works in reading the clues and the brave cat-and-mouse game she plays to trap her dangerous adversaries.

From the beginning, we spend a lot of time in the mind of a 12-year old boy, Kyle, who collects a package of drugs and money that fell out of a fatal car crash he witnesses on his paper route. He is a loner, tagged by everyone as a retard, but his main problem appears to be a speech defect more than intellectual challenges. He hopes the money can help save his mother, who is struggling with poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, and looking for love in all the wrong places. Her greedy boyfriend interferes with his plans and brings the wolves to their door with a scheme to profit from the windfall. Kyle's resourcefulness and resilience in this tough situation where even the police can't be trusted is a wonder to behold. His constantly biking around in 20 below-zero weather never failed to put an edge of worry in my sympathy for his desperate straits.

The strength of the Pickett series lies in the unconventional job for its crime investigator, his dogged Dudley-Do-Right character willing to pursue underhanded means to achieve justice, the outdoor settings of the action, and themes relating to the rural environment of the mountain west and its exploitation. Having a more typical law enforcement officer for a protagonist takes away some of the uniqueness for Box's work, but having a woman as hero has some interesting challenges to make up for that loss. Like Pickett, and unlike so many other fictional detectives with tormented personalities, Cassie is emotionally healthy, has a playful mind, and is easy to identify with. I look forward to giving her a chance in any future reads (unclear if this is a series). I am not sure if I will backtrack to the pair of books set in Montana, "Back of Beyond" and "The Highway", the latter of which has some backstory for Cassie.

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### **Michele says**

This was the first CJ Box novel I've read and I was \*not\* disappointed. Billed as a standalone novel (as opposed to his long-running series), I found that he has actually written one novel prior to this one that featured this same protagonist. Events in that prior novel are certainly important to this one so I do take issue with the whole "stand alone" thing. I was able to figure it out, but as a reader who does NOT like to read things out of order, it really bugged me throughout. So I do warn you, if you like to read things in order, please find the novel previous to BADLANDS and zip through that (The Highway) first. Goodreads has this book properly marked as Cassie Dewell #2, but it doesn't have The Highway properly marked as Cassie Dewell #1, so it gets confusing.

Badlands focuses on detective Cassie Dewell, a character I really enjoyed. Cassie is pushing middle age, a single mother, has just about given up on ever losing that last twenty pounds, and doesn't have the time or inclination for a proper haircut. In other words, she's a real person. What's not to love? She's also damn good at her job and smart as a whip. She's taken a new job in the badlands of North Dakota where the oil is booming and crime is even worse, mostly due to the huge influx of the drug market. And with drugs come the violence of gangs who don't think twice about murdering those who get in their way. Cassie's first case involves police corruption and a heart-breaking mentally-challenged young boy who inadvertently finds himself in the middle of drug gang that will stop at nothing to recover their lost product. The police corruption offers the boy no protection and it's Cassie's job to figure out who to trust and save that boy.

A true page-turner, CJ Box paces his novel perfectly and you won't want to put it down. Cassie is a fantastic protagonist...flawed of course, but just as we all are. I do hope he writes more about her because I will read it eagerly.

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## **Cheryl says**

Since I read The Highway by Mr. Box. I have not been able to stop reading his books. I can't get my hands on his books fast enough. His latest one is a good one. I thought however that it was a little bit of a change from his current books. It was not as high pressure intensity with the action or the killer being as prominent. Yet, despite all of this I still liked this book a lot and read it quickly.

I was drawn more to Kyle's storyline then I was Cassie. While they are both tied together in the end, I felt that Cassie's side was somewhat lackluster. Kyle was such a sweetheart. I was cheering for him the whole time. I would have to say that this book was more character driven then action paced.

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## **Sandy \*The world could end while I was reading and I would never notice\* says**

This is my third CJ Box book. Having previously read Back of Beyond, and The Highway and really enjoying them, Badlands fell a little flat with me.

I don't particularly enjoy stories about drug/gang wars and so this was a negative for me from the start. I was looking forward to continuing the story of the hunt for 'the Lizard King', and in this respect the book starts off promisingly enough. But we are soon diverted into the drug war by a shift of location for Deputy Cassie Dewell to Grimstad, North Dakota, where Cassie has just been appointed Deputy Sherriff.

Grimstad was a nothing town until oil was discovered. Now it is growing too fast for its infrastructure and problems are beginning to surface. Drugs and prostitution abound. There is a least one 'bad' cop in the department whom Cassie has been tasked with uncovering. And there is a twelve year old paperboy who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and who picked up a package thrown out of an overturned car and took it home.

There are people looking for that package, bad people who will stop at nothing to recover it. And they certainly are not going to allow a twelve year old learning challenged boy to stand in their way.

I loved Kyle's character. He is a charming, determined boy with a bad life but big dreams, and is probably the highlight of this whole book.

This is not a bad book. It just didn't have the same sense of tension that I felt in the previous two.

Will I read the next book in this series? Definitely. This Lizard King thing has me hooked.

Thank you to NetGalley and HarperCollins Publishers Australia for the ARC of Badlands in exchange for an honest and unbiased review.

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## **David Highton says**

A police story based in the oil fracking area in North Dakota, with drug cartels the core of a lot of very

violent action. A new job for Cassie Dewel from The Highway book in Montana finds this as her first case in temperatures of -20c

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## LJ says

First Sentence: Twelve-year-old Kyle Westergaard was halfway through his route delivering the Grimstad Tribune when he heard the high whine of car engines on the highway in the dark.

Det. Cassie Dewell, working with the FBI, thinks they may finally have caught the Lizard King, an independent long-haul trucker, a serial killer of prostitutes, and the man partially responsible for the murder of her boss. But do they enough to hold him. Leaving her former post behind, Cassie has transferred to be the new deputy sheriff in Grimstad, ND, a town filled with oil money and drugs. The sheriff suspects the town is about to be flooded with a shipment of meth that came into town is went missing. A very vicious motorcycle gang is in town looking for them. Can Cassie find them first? And what is the role of a young boy on a bicycle?

The Lizard King is a through thread, and an excellent, unsettling one. One need not have read previous books in order to catch the thread, although one may be enticed so do to. That's not a bad thing. One thing that was interesting was to learn the difference between independent truckers and company drivers.

Box is very good at creating a sense of place by painting mental pictures..."December in North Carolina was brown and gray but not white. Light rain fell from a close granite sky. The hardwood trees were tall and skeletal and a thick brown carpet of leaves covered the forest floor."

Box presents an interesting and balanced picture of the positive impact from the economic impact of oil companies on previously small, struggling communities, while also focusing on the negative secondary results of money, drugs, guns and crime. In this instance, those negatives are very dark, and very violent.

Cassie is an excellent protagonist; smart, strong, intelligent yet not without her own issues. You become involved with her and her life. What is particularly nice, is that in Sheriff Jon Kirkbride she has a supportive boss. Kyle proves that no child should be underestimated or disregarded.

"Badlands" is exciting and gripping with an explosive plot twist. One becomes completely involved in a story which provides a satisfying conclusion and a continuing thread to the next book.

BADLANDS (Pol. Proc – Det. Cassie Dewell – North Dakota – Contemp) – Ex

Box, C.J. – 3rd in series

Minotaur Books – July 2015

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