



# Edge of Dark Water

*Joe R. Lansdale*

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May Lynn was a pretty girl from a mean family who dreamed of becoming a film star. Now she's dead - her body dredged up from the Sabine River, bound with wire and weighted down. Her best friend, Sue Ellen, wants to take her ashes to Hollywood. But May Lynn's diary holds a secret: the location of a large sum of money.

## Edge of Dark Water Details

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# From Reader Review Edge of Dark Water for online ebook

## LeAnne says

Imma quote Clairee's famous line from that play set in the magnolia-dotted, small Louisiana town: *if you don't have anything nice to say... come sit by me.*

Pull up a chair, darlin.

Lansdale seems to be loved by lots of southern literary fans, but Im sorry to say that this second of his books that Ive read doesn't count me as one of them.

The story is narrated by a 16 year old East Texas gal back in the Depression era. Her two best friends and her Cure-All sipping mama accompany her in this road-trip tale, and although the author takes great pains to 'specifically tell' the reader that the male friend has perfect diction, grammar, and a huge vocabulary, he slips up occasionally and has the articulate young man toss off "ain'ts" like the two girls in the story. The boy's speech (when there are not editing errors written into it) is awkwardly stilted now and then, even for someone trying very hard to elevate his language. It was a major distraction that kept pulling me out of the story, particularly when the teenage girls, by contrast, constantly used every quaint Southern idiom known to the English.

While Im griping, in the story's first section, we find the mama half passed out drunk from Cure-All with her hair spilled across her pillow like honey. Four chapters later, when some stranger spies her in all of her beauty, the daughter remarks on the gorgeous gloss of her mother's shining black hair. Honey or black? Pick a color.

Okay, so maybe the copy editor was drinking a lil Cure-All him- or herself and missed these boo-boos. But Im not ready to let the cliches slide.

The drunken, lazy, teeth-missing, wife-beating, daughter-groping, black-besmirching, gay-taunting, fish-dynamiting, redneck daddy might seem a *bit* of a stereotype as we meet him in the very first chapter. I regularly judge a story by how well developed the villains are, but I just rolled my eyes and rolled along. He and two other bad guys unfortunately were total cartoons...he starts his role like this:

Redneck Daddy is using big ole tow-sacks of green walnuts to poison fish in a slow turn of the Sabine River (catching dinner with a hook and pole takes too long). He is making his daughter and her "sissy" bestie haul out the half-dead fish along with the big heavy bags of walnuts, as they can be used again downriver to kill some more.

They have some trouble hauling in their lines, and a dead classmate of the teenagers is reeled in, all bloated and hogtied with wire. She has further been weighed down by a sewing machine. Obviously, someone took great pains to hide her body.

But because these people are rednecks from East Texas, we are led to believe that nobody cares whether a killer may be on the loose. Redneck Daddy and his brother want to just push her back in after retrieving their walnuts, but the kids object. The men are too busy gathering the dead fish and drinking to even ride the kids into town to contact the sheriff, so the boy is forced to walk all the way in to get law-enforcement out there. The sheriff asks immediately - how come y'all didn't just push her back in? Yeah - so believable. Without so

much as contacting the dead girls wastrel of a father, she is thrown into a pauper's grave.

Other stuff ensues such that the kids and mama end up on the run. Traveling down the Sabine River, they encounter strangers who each has a story to tell. I mean - their entire life stories. Like, 10 minutes after knowing them. We get - hey, nice to meet ya, lemme explain how we lived through the dust bowl and went off to pick oranges in Cali and rode boxcars to get here (insert The Grapes of Wrath summary here). Or how my daddy owned slaves and bought me a lil colored girl to play with and Imma shoot you dead if you dont chop me some wood.

There are eight dead bodies by the end of the story, but law-enforcement has no interest in investigating any of these deaths. Add to the clunky plotline numerous repeated gross descriptions of axe attacks, the disinterment of bodies (with parts falling off and out of), pus filled infections that squirt you in the face when lanced, eyeballs removed with a spoon, amputations, disembowelments, and you might find a poor imitation of a young Quentin Tarantino.

Shadowing this whole adventure on the lam is a mysterious, mentally deranged assassin who smells so bad he is called Skunk, and gosh-golly. This guy is like the Terminator. Shoot him, stab him, whatever - but he'll be baaaaack.

The initial and final straw - that bugged me for the entirety of the novel - was that there are aspects to the story (published in 2012) that seemed like a plot-line rip off of Mark Childress' Crazy in Alabama- a southern book that I adored and was written in 1993.

At any rate, because I had heard such great things about this author's work, this was a pretty big disappointment. Thanks for having a seat and letting me say nothing nice.

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## **Carmine says**

### **Viaggio per Hollywood**

Joe Lansdale alla ribalta con un romanzo di formazione, vantante forti venature pulp, ambientato nel Texas della grande depressione.

I punti di riferimento - Mark Twain, Stephen King, John Steinbeck - si individuano tranquillamente e ciò non ridimensiona quella che è una buona lettura d'intrattenimento, che forse paga il fatto di esser sulla falsariga di alcune prove precedenti dello stesso autore texano.

Tra vecchiette con il fucile carico e assassini inarrestabili con il feticismo per le collane di mani umane, la storia si snoda con un impianto classico "on the road" e riesce nel messaggio di orgogliosa emancipazione di chi cerca di smarcarsi dall'inedia di un destino segnato.

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## **Melki says**

**"Mama, if you had a friend got drowned, and you found her body, and she always wanted to go to Hollywood to be a movie star, would it be wrong to dig her up after she was buried, burn her to ashes, take them down to Gladewater in a jar, catch a bus, and take her out to Hollywood?"**

Yeah...strange as that sounds, the above paragraph is, in a nutshell, the plot of this book.

Poor May Lynn! An East Texas girl with only one dress to wear, she had big dreams of being a star, but she ended up dead in the muddy river, her body weighted down by a Singer sewing machine. Now her three friends will risk just about everything to get her to that promised land known as California. They'll face cretins, snakes, whirlpools and a legendary monster who may just be real after all.

If this book were the first novel by a brand new author, I think critics would be hailing it as a great effort by a promising talent. Since this is Lansdale, however, expectations are higher, and this is certainly not his best work. BUT, there is much to like here. It's a fun adventure with great suspense and I was never completely sure what would happen next. Though I went "Ewwww!" several times, there were some surprisingly sweet moments as well. Plus, I loved that sassy, smart-ass named Jinx.

This is not a fantastic book, but it's a pleasant and entertaining enough way to spend a few hours on a muggy summer afternoon.

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## Shelby \*trains flying monkeys\* says

3.5 stars

Sue Ellen and her friends are helping her daddy fish (poison the fish with green walnuts because her daddy is lazy) and they end up finding the body of one of Sue Ellen's friends in the Sabine River. She has been tied to an old sewing machine so that she doesn't come back up, Sue Ellen's daddy and her uncle both want to just throw the body back in the river but the kids won't let them.

The story is set back in the Depression so finding a body was not the big deal it has become today. Her dead friend May Lynn had always wanted to go to Hollywood and become a star but ends up just getting tossed in a pauper's grave the next day. End of story. Not.

The kids can't stand that thought so they decide to dig up and burn May Lynn's body and to take her ashes to Hollywood.

These kids are some of the best characters. You have Sue Ellen who at sixteen pretty much takes care of herself. Her mama stays in bed most of the time with her "Cure-All" and her daddy is just pure mean especially once he starts drinking.

**My grandma on Daddy's side always said I didn't act like a girl at all, and I ought to stay home learning how to keep a garden and shell peas and do women's work. Grandma would lean forward in her rocker, look at me with no love in her gooey eyes, and say, "Sue Ellen, how you gonna get a husband you can't cook or clean worth a flip, and don't never do your hair up?"**

Sue Ellen gives no fucks.

Then you have her pal Terry, his mom recently married again gaining him several step brothers and sisters and a step-father who makes fun of Terry's "sissy" ways.

Jinx (my favorite) a black girl with a tongue that can cut down even the biggest man.

All these kids know they are doomed if they stay in the small town.

They find some stolen money and head off down the Sabine with Sue Ellen's mama along for the ride.

There are some bad guys chasing them though. The money they took is wanted by the Constable of the town they are leaving, Sue Ellen's Uncle and daddy and then one of the Bottoms legends comes to life. The legendary "Skunk" who will hunt down anyone for the pleasure of killing them and taking their hands.

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## Trish says

Is there a more prolific writer of westerns than Joe Lansdale? Endlessly inventive, Lansdale has both a series featuring Hap & Leonard, and a slew of standalones in which he shares the way even good people can get themselves in a bad way in a world with evil in it.

In this novel, published in 2012 by Mulholland Books, 16-year-old Sue Ellen is narrating. She lives in a small southern town and has two friends her age: a white gay boy named Terry who is reluctant to let anyone know his inclinations, and Jinx, a black girl friend since childhood. Lansdale is so natural in his use of skin color that he can teach us things we never knew we needed to know.

Sue Ellen, Terry, and Jinx discover the town's beauty, May Lynn, killed and submerged in the river, tied by the ankle with wire attached to a sewing machine. None of the grown men in the town seem to want to pursue the matter, but merely shove the body in a casket and cover up the evidence. We get a bad feeling, but mostly we sense any sixteen-year-olds ought to pack up & leave that place, so when the kids decide that's what they're going to do, we're onboard.

They're floating, by the way, on a wooden raft, and along the way they pick up more than one who decides to go with them. Seems like practically everyone who knows their plans—to go to Hollywood—wants to go with them, if not the whole way, at least far enough to get out of town. There's a posse of folks, more than one, following behind, looking for them, so it gets hectic and dangerous and the hangers-on fall off, one by one.

Lansdale always seems to get the tone right, however, and when there is a chance for evil to thrive he makes us question whether or not that's the way we want things to play out. After all this is kind of a crime novel, kind of a police procedural, kind of a mystery, but it's got heart...more heart than we've come to expect of the genre. I like the way people think and make choices that seem fair and right and good.

Lansdale himself is really kind of a standalone guy. As far as I know there isn't anyone else doing this kind of crossover writing with lessons on race, human nature, and on right and wrong. It is never sappy, often funny, and always deeply thoughtful. He is not religious: "I got misery enough in my life without adding religion to it," says a character in one of his later novels. The language he uses is country, and can be extremely descriptive, if not entirely proper: "Expectations is a little like fat birds—it's better to kill them in case they flew away" or "certain feelings rose to the surface like dead carp."

The Hap & Leonard series has been made into a TV series starring Michael Kenneth Williams and James Purefoy. It is a rich stew of southern storytelling, darkened by reality but leavened with laughter. I don't think I need to state how difficult it is to create new characters, new language, and new situations every year

(sometimes more than once a year? is it possible?) and hit the bell each time. I'm a fan.

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## **Suzy says**

### **reread review October, 2018**

I enjoyed this as much the second time around as the first. I really believe that listening is the way to go with *Edge of Dark Water*. Angele Masters is true to her name - masterful! This starts out seeming like a straightforward story about people living in poverty in 1930's depression-era deep east Texas and the quest of three teenagers to get out of town. But it develops to include local swamp folk tales, best told round the campfire. Is Skunk - the ugly stinky evil man who roams the river bottoms - real or a folk legend, someone to be actually feared, or just a story to make your hair stand on end? Will the three teenagers who set out to go to Hollywood in honor of their dead friend make it or will they be done in by their harrowing trip down the Sabine River to get the bus to California? Find out the answers to these and other questions by picking up Lansdale's book - preferably in audio! Recommended!

### **original review April, 2013**

This is my first Joe R. Lansdale book, but won't be my last. Atmospheric, suspenseful, scary, touching. Part coming of age story, part murder mystery, part Steven King-like scary - I loved it! Loved the depression-era East Texas river bottoms setting, loved the teen characters who are at the center, loved the sometimes spine-chilling adventure. Lansdale's writing is awesome. He captures deep East Texas and liberally sprinkles humor throughout a truly suspenseful book. *Angele Masters* was excellent, really nailing Sue Ellen's perspective and all the voices.

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## **Lou says**

I must alert you, do you smell something in the air?

No?

Good!

As that would have been a sign that the myth of the Skunk Man is real, his presence is known by a skunk like smell. A legend or a myth, be he what you please, he is a character that Lansdale has created in this story of fiction. He certainly adds a thrill to the tale. Skunk man presents death, a bogeyman like character that one shall tell tales of and our main characters in this story hope to be not true.

Sue Ellen a young woman, sixteen years old, she is a gem of a gal a diamond amongst the rough. Lansdale writes through her eyes, he walks you through her thoughts and uncensored point of view of her harsh and brutal environment. I loved her humorous thoughts and insight. With might and main Sue Ellen and her companions will embark on an journey an odyssey of survival and endurance. They need to do a deed out of goodness of their hearts to a departed soul a soul that was young, talented and beautiful whom died under queer circumstances. Also an important reason for their journey is to escape from brutal hands of evil that men do. A window of opportunity opens up along the course of things, that present a chance of bigger pockets, happier hearts and greener pastures. The other equally wonderful character and gal is Jinx a young black girl who is full of courage and heart, needed in the by gone days of the deep south. Sue Ellen's mother is a woman who needs to wise up and take care of her daughter her problem is most of the time, when at home with her husband, shes under the influence of an alcoholic concoction called Laudanum.

Lansdale writes with realism of the South, with a prose that's has vigor heaped with heart.

He immerses you into the heart of darkness with characters that pack plenty heart and gusto. These characters are a rare occurrence to find but when you do you should be the best of friends, ones you could trust your life with. What presents for me great story telling are character's that leave a mark, coupled with clear and simple writing packed with realism.

Lansdale's story is reminiscent of the works of Faulkner, Twain and Harper Lee and It will last the course of time as a classic alongside 'To Kill a Mockingbird.'

Joe R. Lansdale remember that authors name because he is about to break down genre barriers and surpasses tags of fitting into certain book readers categories. A book for both the male and female reader alike that will make a mark on all ages down to young teens as a must read for 2012. This is definitely one to make my best of published work in 2012 list so early on in the year.

A river story that once you embark upon the tale you will not want to finish and gone on and on until the sea ends. A story to savor and cherish. Don't miss it pre-order it now.

**"I sat on the shore and looked at May Lynn's body. It was gathering flies and starting to smell and all I could think of was how she was always clean and pretty, and this wasn't anything that should have happened to her. It wasn't like in the books I had read, and the times I had been to the picture show and people died. They always looked pretty much like they were when they were alive, except sleepy. I saw now that's not how things were. It wasn't any different for a dead person than a shot-dead squirrel or a hog with a cut throat hanging over the scalding pot."**

**"I'd be on it like stink on a dead possum."**

**"Laudanum= an alcoholic solution containing morphine, prepared from opium and firmly used as a narcotic painkiller."**

**An interview i had with the great writer in March 2012 featured @  
<http://more2read.com/review/interview-with-joe-r-lansdale/>**

The review is also featured at my webpage here along with small documentry on the author.

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### **J.K. Grice says**

Another wonderful adventure involving youth and harrowing experiences. Great characters and a great read from the Champion Mojo Storyteller Hisownself :)

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### **Dan Schwent says**

A teenage girl with Hollywood aspirations's body is pulled out of the Sabine River. Her friends Sue Ellen, Jinx, Terry set out to spread her ashes in Hollywood. Unfortunately, some money the deceased girl's brother stole winds up in their possession and numerous ill-tempered people are on their trail. And a murderer named Skunk has been hired to get the money back at any cost. Will Sue Ellen and her friends survive their river odyssey?

Joe Lansdale weaves a coming of age tale set in east Texas. It's a little like Huckleberry Finn, if Huckleberry Finn involved stolen money, a killer that severs hands, and an opium-addicted mother. It's a pretty gripping tale. Sue Ellen comes to grips with her parents, Terry deals with his sexuality, and Jinx deals with being black. Skunk is a pretty chilling villain and the rest of the people chasing the protagonists are cut from the usual Lansdale cloth of redneck scumbags. I didn't see the identity of May Lynn's killer coming. Overall, I was pretty pleased with it.

However, I only gave it a three because I felt like Lansdale has told the story at least twice before, both in *The Bottoms* and *A Fine Dark Line*. It was good but it felt like he was mining familiar territory.

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### **karen says**

this book was just okay.

it's a little east texas huck finn-ette story about a bunch of misfits who take to a raft after their friend is found at the bottom of the river with her hands wrapped in wire and attached to a sewing machine. turns out, she has a map to some buried cash, so they decide to take the money and her ashes to scatter her in hollywood, which is where she would have been headed had she not been, you know, *murdered*.

so all the misfit toys escape their demons and go on a river trip; the girl fleeing her momma's laudanum addiction and her fathers grabby hands, the tough black chick getting outta racistville, the pretty boy homosexual...and then momma emerges out of her stupor long enough to come along. but seems everyone wants in on that cash, and there are several people in hot pursuit of our characters.

it's a fast read, and that might be the problem. there really isn't a lot of character-depth, and the action sequences are about what you would expect.

and i think that is the problem - this book is very expected. not from lansdale; this is my first book by him, but it pretty much turns out the way you know it's gonna, and there is something unformed about its writing. there just aren't a lot of surprises. you do find out who is responsible for may lynn's death, which would've been surprising, but for one early-dropped hint.

i just never felt particularly intrigued by the story, but it is probably because i have read better villains in authors like mccarthy or any number of "crime fiction set in impoverished locales." this one just didn't give me that reader-shake i long for.

too bad, me...

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## Josh says

An atmospheric period piece which unearths the diluted humanity of a time where equal stature regardless of gender, race, and sexual preference was unheard of rendering one class above all with the rest left to fight for scraps. The trials and tribulations of the underclass documented within 'Edge of Dark Water' are confronting, raw, and powerful. For Sue Ellen, living amongst the perpetual weary dream-like trance of her parental figures who either ignore or pay her too much unwanted attention, life by the Sabine River is hard. Upon discovering the bloated corpse of her friend May Lynn, she embarks on a journey which aims to fulfill May's dream of making it to Hollywood (not as a movie star as she had intended in life but scattered ash in death) and presents an opportunity to see the world for more than her poverty stricken situation.

Lansdale captures the eerily emotionally deep and thought provoking characterisation perpetuated by a horrific myth turned true through the eyes of teenagers Sue Ellen, Jinx, and Terry - friends bonded by circumstance and solidified through death.

A survival horror of sorts underpinned by a Woodrell-like place setting which borrows all the good bits from 'The Bottoms' while adding more urgency and natural hurdles to compound the the trio's plight. 'Edge of Dark Water' is all consuming, mixing multiple elements to form a well rounded novel sure to terrify and keep you guessing. From Skunk, the evil child grown to man and murderer for hire, a murder mystery with a slight touch of the 'whodunit', a coming of age through discovery of self, and family drama rolled into one - 'Edge of Dark Water' is the complete package. 5 stars.

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## Bandit says

I'm really becoming a fan of Lansdale. Starting to think that his Drive In books were just a one off, since all other books I've read by his were excellent. This one reminded me of The Bottoms. Same lyrical quality. Always the same location, and, while I may never develop appreciation for East Texas or see its charms, it certainly makes for a good story setting. This one takes place somewhere in the 1930's and there is something incredibly powerful and honest about the way Lansdale describes the poverty and the living conditions at the time. But the real stars here are the characters, what a wild bunch, such personalities and so sympathetic despite their faults. The writing is absolutely top notch, the man just has a way with words, perfect rhythm, perfect cadence for this southern tale (or is it a southern gothic), not quite sure, but the book alternates between a mystery, a rollicking adventure and a slasher. It's sort of like a dirty south version of a Tolkien quest. Very dirty, OCD twitching south conveyed through some cinematically vivid and realistic descriptions. Lansdale wit and humor really shine here. Great read. Highly recommended.

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## Steve Lowe says

Great characterization, good plot, took me a bit to really get into it, but once they got moving down the river I was hooked (see what I did there?)

Bonus points for a scene that literally made me jump. This is no hyperbole, and I honestly can't remember the last time I was scared bad enough to flinch while reading a book (14 years old reading the tunnel scene in THE STAND maybe?), but there's a scene toward the end, one paragraph in particular, that made me catch the vapors. It was so bitchin'.

This really is an excellent book, but having just finished Donald Ray Pollock's THE DEVIL ALL THE TIME (which was just nominated for a Shirley Jackson award for best novel), it was hard not to compare the two side by side since they are of similar genres and gothic motifs. No, that's not fair, but it is what it is. And that's a testament to how fucking amazing TDATT is. Read that book, and read this one, too. And then get Tom Piccirilli's The Last Kind Words next month and just revel in the awesomeness.

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### **Cody | codysbookshelf says**

Having finished this book, one will know they did not just read a novel — they had an *experience*.

East Texas, 1933. A teenaged girl's corpse is found, tied, in a river. After her burial, her three friends decide to exhume and cremate her body and transfer it to Hollywood — the Land of Dreams, especially in 1930s rural America — where their now-deceased friend always dreamt of going. She wanted to be a star.

And that's only where the story begins.

Out from there unravels a mystifying tale of murder and coming of age. Complicating matters is a nice bundle of cash, and the tough redneck crooks on this group's tail.

I was not expecting this book to scare me as much as it did. The villain, Skunk, is the stuff of nightmares: he nearly rivals Pennywise the Dancing Clown, for me. I was almost screaming in terror, and had to put the book down a couple times. This one doesn't seem to be marketed as one of Lansdale's horror works, but it definitely falls in that camp. Is this thing scary! But it's full of heart, too. The best combination for a horror novel.

I recommend this to everyone. It's a bucket of fun, all told by a true master wordsmith.

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### **Diane Barnes says**

3 stars because I kept turning pages to see what would happen, and because the voice of the narrator and her two friends were wonderful (especially Jinx). But there were a lot of inconsistencies in this story and a remarkable dead body count in 300 pages, with law enforcement either part of it or looking the other way out of laziness. A nice entertainment for a warm afternoon on my screened porch, but nothing more.

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