

THE CUTTING SEASON: A NOVEL BY ATTICA LOCKE



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"Great writing, the kind that gives you goose bumps." —*Los Angeles Times*



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ATTICA LOCKE

AUTHOR OF *BLACK WATER RISING*

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From Booklist

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Review

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Most helpful customer reviews

65 of 68 people found the following review helpful.

Dennis Lehane's first book for his new imprint - a great choice!

By Luanne Ollivier

I have a mental list of authors that I faithfully follow and I pick up everything they write. I know what I like and I have a good idea of what I'll be reading. But on the other side of that coin - picking up a book by an unfamiliar author is an adventure.

The Cutting Season is Attica Locke's second book. I missed her debut novel - Black Water Rising - it won numerous prize nominations and lots of praise. But, after reading The Cutting Season, I can see why. Attica Locke is good -really good.

Caren Gray and her young daughter have returned home to Belle Vie - the Louisiana plantation Caren was raised on. Her family history with Belle Vie stretches back to the days when her ancestors were slaves in the sugar cane fields. Now the plantation is a tourist attraction and Caren is the manager. It's not the path she wanted to pursue in life and she has mixed feelings about returning to the plantation.

When an migrant worker is found murdered on the grounds, old and new wounds are opened - long buried history and new controversy. And Caren puts herself in the middle....

Locke drew me in immediately. I was of course caught up in the present day whodunit. There are lots of suspects and the path to the answer is winding. But, at the same time, Caren is caught up in the disappearance of her ancestor Jason, one hundred years ago. Locke skillfully weaves the unravelling of both narratives together.

The mysteries are intriguing, but I enjoyed Locke's exploration of race, politics, business, history and yes, love, just as much. The juxtaposition of abolished slavery and the plight of migrant workers today provides much food for thought.

The character of Caren came across as 'real'. Her own uncertainties, her relationship with her daughter, her ex and her coworkers all rang true. All of the supporting characters were just as well drawn. Having worked as a historical interpreter I enjoyed the descriptions of the cast and their dialogue.

Locke's prose are wonderfully rich and atmospheric and brought her settings to life.

"That beneath its loamy topsoil, the manicured grounds and gardens, two centuries of breathtaking wealth and spectacle--a stark beauty both irrepressible and utterly incapable of even the smallest nod of contrition--lay a land both black and bitter, soft to the touch, and pressing in its power. She should have known that one day it would spit out what it no longer had use for, the secrets it would no longer keep."

For this reader, a winner on all fronts. (And I'll be hunting down that first book!) Locke has been added to my 'list'.

Dennis Lehane has picked The Cutting Season as the first book for his new imprint for Harper Collins.

"I was first struck by Attica Locke's prose, then by the ingenuity of her narrative and finally and most deeply by the depth of her humanity. She writes with equal amounts grace and passion. After just two novels, I'd probably read the phone book if her name was on the spine."

25 of 28 people found the following review helpful.

She had all the pieces of a great novel but failed to put the puzzle together.

By Book Him Danno

Imagine you were just beginning a game of Clue and I said to you "Hey, it was either Mr. Green with Revolver in the Library, or Miss Scarlett with the Lead Pipe in the Kitchen, or Colonel Mustard with the Rope in the Ballroom." Then I let you wander around aimlessly the whole game before apropos of nothing I said it was the last choice. Now let's finish the game. That is the frustration I felt with this book.

It seems the author wanted to write a great novel of modern race relations but felt compelled to force it into a

mystery format, thus missing on both fronts. The unfortunate problem is Ms. Locke is a very talented writer, the setting of her book was beautiful, her characters had definite possibilities, and the crime itself was intriguing. She had all the pieces for a great novel but failed to put the puzzle together.

I think the plot derailed with the choice of main character, Caren, the caretaker of the living history museum Belle Vie Plantation. While an interesting person in her own right she never really investigated anything, nor as an ordinary citizen did she have an avenue to. Rather like my initial analogy, she was just a person to whom full solutions could be presented to over the course of the book. Typically a solid mystery would have a character dig into the threads of a solution and as the story progresses slowly find the truth. The side character of the investigative reporter would have had the means to pull that off much better.

Then when we are given the big climax wherein all is explained and it really comes as a complete package instead of a rewarding journey. There was so much to be explored and discussed between the two family histories, both Caren's and the villain's, and the two crimes, both ancient and modern.

In the end there were the seeds of a great novel contained in *The Cutting Season* that I would have loved to have read, and Attica Locke is more than capable of writing it. This novel was okay and worth the read, but I am anxiously awaiting her next effort with high hopes she hits the homerun I feel is coming.

22 of 25 people found the following review helpful.

4.5 stars for a gripping literary mystery with deep historical roots

By Kindle Customer

The basics: *The Cutting Season* is the story of Belle Vie, an old sugar plantation in Ascension Parish, Louisiana. Caren currently runs Belle Vie, which has been turned into a historical site. Tours regularly come through to witness the history of how the land was once farmed by slaves. It's also a popular location for weddings and special events. Caren's ancestors once worked as slaves on Belle Vie, and her mother worked there as a cook. With deep, complicated family ties to the land, Caren returned home to Belle Vie with her nine-year-old daughter Morgan. When the body of a young woman is discovered on the grounds of the plantation, Caren finds herself trying to solve the crime and discover if there's a connection to the mystery of why her great-great-great-grandfather disappeared from this land so many years ago.

My thoughts: If pressed to pick a genre for this novel, I would begrudgingly call it a literary mystery. Somehow this moniker sells it short to me, however, as Locke uses a mystery to explore themes of race, class, history and progress. Caren is a fascinating character who slowly shares the details of her life, and the lives of her ancestors, with the reader. I appreciated how Locke used Caren to demonstrate the complicatedness of her relationship with Southern history.

I devoured this novel in twenty-four hours, and even though Locke sprinkled only minor clues throughout the novel, I did correctly guess the resolution to both the historic and contemporary storylines quite early. While normally figuring out the ending dampens my enjoyment of a mystery, in this case it did not. Finding out who killed the young woman on Belle Vie is never really the focus of the story. Caren gets caught up in the investigation, but the more urgent and fascinating storyline is of the plantation itself. Locke traces its history from before the Civil War, through emancipation, to Caren's childhood and, finally, to present day. Glimpsing into race relations over all of these years was illuminating enough, but what sets Locke apart from her peers is her ability to also weave in detail about business, politics, love, and parenting. Her books feel like complete worlds, and thus provide the reader with a multi-dimensional tale.

The verdict: *The Cutting Season* falls a little short of the impossibly high standards Locke set with *Black Water Rising*, but it will enchant fans of fiction with social justice themes. The mystery's resolution didn't

surprise me, but Locke's writing, characterization and exploration of historical and contemporary race relations on a Louisiana sugar plantation are powerful enough to transcend the mystery's slight weakness. Locke once again proves she can write about the past and present powerfully.

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