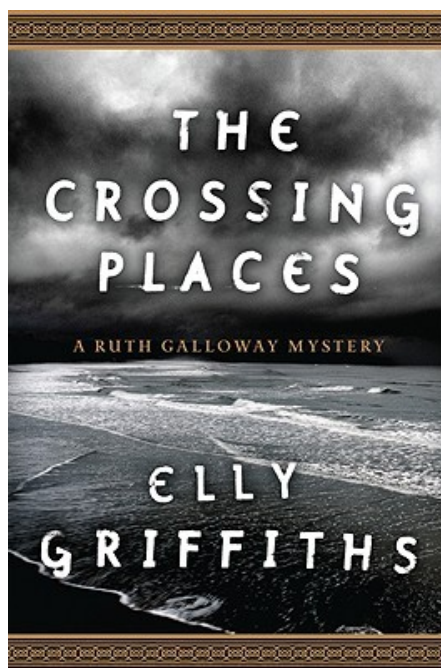




The Crossing Places

Elly Griffiths

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The Crossing Places Elly Griffiths

When she's not digging up bones or other ancient objects, quirky, tart-tongued archaeologist Ruth Galloway lives happily alone in a remote area called Saltmarsh near Norfolk, land that was sacred to its Iron Age inhabitants - not quite earth, not quite sea.

When a child's bones are found on a desolate beach nearby, Detective Chief Inspector Harry Nelson calls Galloway for help. Nelson thinks he has found the remains of Lucy Downey, a little girl who went missing ten years ago. Since her disappearance he has been receiving bizarre letters about her, letters with references to ritual and sacrifice.

The bones actually turn out to be two thousand years old, but Ruth is soon drawn into the Lucy Downey case and into the mind of the letter writer, who seems to have both archaeological knowledge and eerie psychic powers. Then another child goes missing and the hunt is on to find her.

As the letter writer moves closer and the windswept Norfolk landscape exerts its power, Ruth finds herself in completely new territory – and in serious danger.

THE CROSSING PLACES marks the beginning of a captivating new crime series featuring an irresistible heroine.

The Crossing Places Details

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Author : Elly Griffiths

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From Reader Review The Crossing Places for online ebook

Carol ?? says

This was a very solid start to the series.

Griffiths gives Ruth both a complete world and persona, without too much info dumping.

I became absolutely absorbed in her story & wanted to find out what happened to the two missing girls.

Some of the writing really captures the feelings of those involved;

"What I'm afraid of," says Delilah suddenly in a high, strained voice, "is that one day someone asks me how many children I have and I say four, not five. Because then I'll know that it's over, that she's dead."

And the end line of each chapter has a wonderful hook, that makes the book very difficult to put down.

For me, the book fell away slightly at the ending. It Was All a Bit Much. Too many strands to tie in, too many odd/mad/difficult/criminal people.

I also didn't like the gratuitous swipe at a mother breastfeeding a toddler. Felt like the author climbing on to her own little hobby horse.

But I am more than keen to read another instalment of Ruth's adventures.

Andrea says

I've been wanting to make a start on this series for a couple of years, so I was glad to have the opportunity to slot this #1 instalment into one of my reading challenges.

A reasonably fast-paced mystery/crime/thriller, the things I liked most about this book were the two main characters - Dr Ruth Galloway and DCI Hary Nelson - and the desolate Norfolk location.

What I didn't like so much was the extremely flimsy pretext upon which Ruth, an archaeologist, was drawn into the investigation of the child abductions, and the fact that I could see *whodunnit* the moment the character was introduced to the story. But I can forgive both of these things, the first being necessary to bring Ruth and Harry together in a professional context, and the second being perhaps attributed to first-time-crime writing. Instalment #2 already has my name on it.

Fictionophile says

This is the first in a series by Elly Griffiths which features Ruth Galloway,

a forensic archaeologist who lives alone with her two cats in an isolated cottage on Norfolk's Saltmarsh coast. Ruth is ascerbic, solitary and strangely loveable. She works as the Head of Forensic Archaeology at the University of North Norfolk.

Thirty-something and a bit overweight, she does not have much of a social life, nor does she want one. However, she is drawn to DCI Harry Nelson, the police inspector who was instrumental in solving the mystery in "The Crossing Places".

Since reading this novel, I have read the rest in the series and they continue to be of the highest quality. Highly recommended!

Brenda says

I was pleasantly surprised by this book! I really enjoyed getting to know Ruth and Nelson. I think I needed something without gore, cussing, psychological darkness. Not that this was light reading by any means. The salt water marsh setting was a major character, and the archeological artifacts and mythic stories added a sense of doom. I've already ordered the next two books in the series!

Sheila Beaumont says

This is the first book in Elly Griffiths' mystery series featuring archaeologist Ruth Galloway, and it looks like I've found a new favorite series to follow. What I like most about this book are the characters, all of them interesting and vividly portrayed, a couple of them quite bizarre. And Ruth is an irresistible heroine. I also enjoyed the atmospheric descriptions of the salt marsh in Norfolk, which made me feel as if I were there. The author is a fine storyteller too. The plot is complex, suspenseful, and exciting.

I'm late in discovering this series, but I am glad I can look forward to reading all these books for the first time. I see there are ten in the series so far, with another one on the way.

Kim says

I thought I'd like this novel much more than I did. It's not terrible. Indeed, it has some good features. However, I found it disappointing and predictable overall.

First the good points. The central protagonist, Ruth Galloway, is an academic forensic archeologist. Her occupation has plenty of potential for an absorbing crime fiction series and the narrative contains some interesting discussion about matters archeological. In addition, the location - the salt marshes of Norfolk in the east of England - is suitably atmospheric and a welcome change of pace from the more usual urban or village settings of English crime fiction.

However, the not-so-good aspects of the novel overwhelm the more positive ones. Griffiths is by no means a terrible writer but her prose is on the clunky side. This is partly because she chose to tell the story in the third person and in the present tense, which is tricky to get right. Hilary Mantel pulls it off in *Wolf Hall*, but then Mantel is a rather exceptional writer. The device is much less successful here. The characterisation is also

not particularly successful. Ruth Galloway, while a likeable protagonist, is a walking cliché: a late thirties, overweight, single woman whose cats are her substitute children. And before readers of this review comment that I'm the one creating a cliché about cats being a substitute for children, Griffiths has her character specifically state that this is the role the cats play in her life. The supporting characters have little depth and are also very much on the cliché spectrum. Another real weakness with the novel is the predictability of the plot. Even though I'm generally not good at solving fictional crime before the big reveal, I easily identified the villain from virtually his first appearance.* The villain is so obvious that I didn't even feel clever about having done so.

This is the first novel in a series. I'm not going to completely dismiss the possibility of reading the second in the series, as I liked Ruth, the details of her occupation and the setting, but I won't be making it a priority and I doubt I'll go any further than number 2 unless the quality of the writing improves markedly. This one is possibly better than just okay, but it doesn't quite hit the heights of good, so the rating comes in at 2-1/2 stars.

*I appreciate that revealing the gender of the villain is a spoiler, but given the details of the plot, the villain was inevitably going to be male. Here's another spoiler provided as a warning to sensitive readers. (view spoiler) While the narrative is not especially gruesome or graphic, that may be a deal-breaker for some.

Ivonne Rovira says

Once an author had a thought: If I set a section of this novel in present tense, it will make a contrast with the rest of the novel and the main narrator. It will breathe some immediacy into that segment and, along with italics, will really distinguish one section from another, one narrator from another.

As with most innovation, lesser lights immediately fell upon it. If a section is good, wouldn't the entire novel be even better? And won't the present tense bestow a sense of immediacy and a *frisson* that my writing lacks?

The answer is *no*. Present-tense verbs just disorient the reader — especially in a mystery novel where so much of the action occurred in — you know — the past. It just seems amateurish, an admission that the plot can't generate enough excitement, so the author must employ gimmicks. Additionally, when the past perfect tense crops up — as it must in a mystery — the usage particularly jars as it isn't contraposed with past tense but present. I thought I could get used to it, but the misguided present-tense usage annoyed me almost to the very end of the novel.

Which is a shame, as so many readers are likely to give up without giving this otherwise serviceable debut mystery a chance. Elly Griffiths' *The Crossing Places* provides an interesting heroine in Ruth Galloway, a *zaftig* forensic archeologist and lecturer at the fictional University of North Norfolk near England's eastern marshy coast. Pushing 40, she's a woman who knows her own mind and who isn't about to be bullied, patronized or rendered silly by any man. Detective Chief Inspector Harry Nelson, her partner in the investigation, proves less believable: He's equal parts Lancashire hardnosed policeman and a man sensitive enough to appreciate Ruth's self-reliance and intelligence, an unpolished giant of man with antiquated ideas about the world but an out-of-character appreciation of a modern woman. Much of Nelson's character seems designed simply to contrast with either Ruth herself or one of the other men — reedy academics all — in her life.

The mystery's plot — the disappearance of two preschoolers near Norfolk's desolate, gray Saltmarsh area a decade apart — proves intriguing, as is the novel's exploration of the regrets everyone encounters on reaching middle age, of the little bits of condescension that women everywhere must endure from men who

remain certain that they know better, and of how love survives despite flaws and betrayals and the terrible, terrible tribulations that life throws at some. While the final 30 pages are suspenseful, most readers will have figured out the perpetrator long before then, and his motivation never seems plausible.

Still, as this is Griffiths' first mystery novel, it's only right to make some allowance. All in all, *The Crossing Places* merits three stars and a promise to read — eventually — the second novel in the series, *The Janus Stone*. But not for a while.

Kathy says

The only reason that I'm not kicking myself for having not started to read this series before now is that I am experiencing the thrill of a newly discovered favorite series. Nothing is sweeter in reading than that first kiss of what you know is going to be a special reading adventure. Elly Griffiths has been on my reading radar for ages, and thanks to her appearance at the upcoming Bouchercon Mystery Convention, I am finally beginning the Ruth Galloway series.

Ruth Galloway is an archaeologist living in a remote saltmarsh area of Norfolk, England. Her teaching duties at the local university, her friends, and her two cats provide a satisfying life for her. Approaching the age of 40 and being slightly overweight are the only two issues that trouble her much. All that changes when bones are discovered in the saltmarshes by her home, and Ruth, a bone forensic/preservation expert, is called on by Detective Chief Inspector Harry Nelson to examine those bones. Nelson is hoping that the bones belong to a child who went missing ten years ago, hoping to bring closure to the case and the girl's parents. However, although the bones to belong to a child, that child is from the Iron Age of British history. Nelson is disheartened, and Ruth doesn't expect to see him again. Then, a second little girl is abducted, and Nelson again involves Ruth to peruse letters sent to him over the course of both missing girls' investigations, letters with references that Ruth might understand from her professional viewpoint. Before long, a connection between the two disappearances and local archeological discoveries, both past and present, begins to surface. Ruth struggles to make sense of it all, as old friends and new add to the confusion of false perceptions and reality. Nelson, whom Ruth never expected to even see again, becomes an integral part of her world. From her isolated saltmarsh home and shell of self-sufficiency, Ruth Galloway bursts into the world as a crucial link between life and death.

Elly Griffiths creates suspense that is cringe-worthy, that delicious and tormented feeling of wanting to close your eyes at what's coming, but being unable to look away. Atmosphere abounds, and you savor it. She is one of those master storytellers who create the perfect ebb and flow. The character of Ruth Galloway is one I've been waiting for, flaws with which I can identify and strengths that are much admired. Her contrast to Harry Nelson creates a wonderful yin to yang. All the characters are interesting, well-developed attributes of the story. The plot is filled with twists and turns and a few red herrings that unite into a fascinatingly scary tale. I finished the book and immediately ordered the rest of the series thus far published. I'm now like a kid looking for a Christmas package to arrive. Ah!

Richard Derus says

25. **Pearl Ruled:** THE CROSSING PLACES by ELLY GRIFFITHS

Rating: 1.875* of five (p126)

The Book Description: When she's not digging up bones or other ancient objects, quirky, tart-tongued archaeologist Ruth Galloway lives happily alone in a remote area called Saltmarsh near Norfolk, land that was sacred to its Iron Age inhabitants - not quite earth, not quite sea.

When a child's bones are found on a desolate beach nearby, Detective Chief Inspector Harry Nelson calls Galloway for help. Nelson thinks he has found the remains of Lucy Downey, a little girl who went missing ten years ago. Since her disappearance he has been receiving bizarre letters about her, letters with references to ritual and sacrifice.

The bones actually turn out to be two thousand years old, but Ruth is soon drawn into the Lucy Downey case and into the mind of the letter writer, who seems to have both archaeological knowledge and eerie psychic powers. Then another child goes missing and the hunt is on to find her.

As the letter writer moves closer and the windswept Norfolk landscape exerts its power, Ruth finds herself in completely new territory – and in serious danger.

THE CROSSING PLACES marks the beginning of a captivating new crime series featuring an irresistible heroine.

My Review: Hell, damn and BLAST!! I love the idea for this series. I am a fiend for archaeological settings in novels. I am a fan of tart-tongued women. (Look at my friends list and tell me that's exaggerated.) And I am always down for another series, since that makes the spaces between discoveries of books fuller and more bearable.

But it's just not good.

When he has gone, Ruth sits on the sofa, at the opposite end to the place where there is a faint bloodstain on the faded chintz. She looks at the remains of her meal with Shona and wonders, dully, how long ago it was that they sat at this table talking about men.

(p126, US hardcover edition)

And that is where my patience snapped. The rest of that paragraph floated past me like poop down the john. A huge sucking sound was heard, the bowl of my mind filled up with clear water, and there was no more interest to be found by me in this book. This writing is what, politely (yes, I do know what the word means), I would characterize as “serviceable.” But laddies and gentlewomen, I am over 50 and the days ahead number fewer than the days behind. What am I doing mucking about with “serviceable” when so much that's GOOD awaits discovery?

So no more Mr. Nice Guy. You don't cut the mustard, writer dear, you're on the scrapheap of history.

Taryn Pierson says

Is it just me, or is this book criminally under the radar? I'm not even sure where I heard about it or how it ended up on my list, but it's certainly not one I've seen bandied about much. I didn't even have any immediate plans to read it—I used an Audible credit on it out of desperation one night when the two other books I planned to read next in audio turned out not to be available in the format (#firstworldproblems).

My sweet spot when it comes to mysteries and thrillers is somewhere between cozy and brutal, which in my experience can be a pretty narrow target to hit. I am weirded out by books that are too cutesy or jokey about death, but I also can't stomach outright gore. So my ideal mysteries are the kind that take crime seriously, but don't wallow around in the bloody details. As I flipped through my TBR, desperately searching for anything that might fit the bill, I reread the synopsis of *The Crossing Places* and thought, yeah, that sounds about right. And it totally was!

Ruth Galloway is my jam. I don't know when I've more closely identified with a character. She's an antisocial nerd, a bit overweight, much more confident in her field of expertise than interactions with people. Her work as an archaeologist leads the police to seek her help on a case dealing with bones found in a salt marsh near her home. The bones turn out to be thousands of years old, and not those of a missing girl, but Ruth gets sucked into the case anyway, partly out of her own interest and partly by forces out of her control. While I'm a little miffed that I hadn't heard of this series before now, I'm tickled that there are eight other books for me to enjoy, no waiting required.

More book recommendations by me at www.readingwithhippos.com

Steven says

While there was a certain amount of predictability in this novel, the ride was fun and the journey wasn't hard work, so all in all, I can say I enjoyed it immensely. :)

Stephanie says

The One Sentence Summary: A forensic archaeologist called in to examine a body found preserved in a salt marsh is drawn into the police investigation for two missing girls abducted ten years apart, and perhaps, into the killer's crosshairs herself.

The Meat and Potatoes: Ruth Galloway, a short, stout forensic archaeologist living in a cottage on the barren saltmarsh where she was involved in a dig ten years prior, is called to examine a body found only steps from her home. Though the body is from the Iron Age and can't possibly be that of a girl abducted ten years prior, the body and the abduction seem linked by letters that taunt the police with cryptic messages that the girl will be found "where the Earth meets the sky." Then another young girl goes missing. The abductions seem to be connected to the Bronze Age henge that was excavated on the salt marshes, the Iron Age body that marks a mystical boundary, and the causeway connecting the two. As the evidence begins to point to someone with archaeological knowledge and ties to the land itself, Ruth has no choice but to take a closer look at the people in her life. Her mentor, her former lover, her best friend—all were involved in the excavation of the henge at the time the first girl went missing.

The Crossing Places creates an interesting intersection of archaeology and law enforcement, of history and the present. The setting, the harsh and dangerous marshland in the fictional town of Saltmarsh outside Norfolk, England, is creative and works well in the story.

The characters are believable, if a bit cliché. While Ruth, a nearly-forty overweight bookworm, is not the typical heroine of crime novels, she is the typical spinster academic, complete with cats as child-substitutes (a fact that is noted by the character herself). The other main character, Detective Chief Inspector Nelson, fits the traditional cop role almost to a T. He is a large, physical man with a gruff manner and a fairly

stereotypical view of women, academics, and non-traditional ways of life such as the New Agers that he encounters in the story. He is given greater depth as the story goes on and we get more into his head, but the initial distaste carries through the novel.

The Crossing Places is written in the third person, present tense, which is also unusual. It seems calculated to give a feeling of immediacy to the events of the novel, but it ends up just being confusing and distracting. Griffiths uses the past perfect (had walked, had visited, had thought) most often to discuss events in the past, even though, as the present is in the present tense, the simple past (walked, visited, thought) would work in most cases.

The Praiseworthy: The best thing about *The Crossing Places* are a series of interludes, set in Italics, in a first person voice. These are presented without context, and the reader is left to interpret them for themselves. These interludes give us piecemeal information about the crime, increase the intrigue of the story, and present the most genuine voice in the novel. (view spoiler)

The Shortcomings: Unfortunately, the writing is the biggest shortcoming in *The Crossing Places*. Overall, it's very simplistic and employs a lot of devices that are the first things cautioned against in any creative writing program. Consider how the author first introduces the physical description of her main character:

Ruth . . . stares unseeingly into the steamy mirror. She knows what she will see Shoulder-length brown hair, blue eyes, pale skin—and however she stands on the scales, which are at present banished to the broom cupboard—she weighs twelve and a half stone.

Instead of taking the time to drop the character's description more naturally into the narrative, Griffiths lays it out for us all at once, as the character stands in front of a mirror. This device is convenient, overused, and lacking in creativity. Griffiths also conveniently drops in explainers of technical jargon when she thinks it necessary for the readers. Early in the story, Ruth is speaking with DCI Nelson and mentions using Carbon 14 analysis to date the body that she has just examined. Although I find it inconceivable that an educated detective would be unfamiliar with Carbon dating, he asks what it is and Ruth promptly explains. I find this even stranger since I would assume that even Griffiths's readers would have a cursory understanding of this process.

Probably the biggest problem with the writing though is the use of the present tense. The present tense begins to falter when used to tell any tale with a significant timeline, and the events of *The Crossing Places* occur over the course of a few months. Also, having the narrative present in the present tense is especially jarring when the characters reflect on the past, as opposed to the more typical device of past tense for the narrative present and past perfect to describe distant events. Oddly enough, even one of the characters objects to the use of the present tense, albeit in the speech of a mother who had murdered her child: "'She gets on my nerves,' said the mother, apparently unrepentant. 'She's a little devil.' The present tense. It still gets to him." I have to admit this gave me a little chuckle.

Other problems with the writing include use of exclamation points that result in campy overemphasis ("Ruth pretends to consider but, of course, she is utterly fascinated. Bones! On the Saltmarsh!"), ellipses creating overdone dramatic effect, ("It could be anything. It could be a find. It could be..."), and phrasing which lets all the tension of a situation drain away. Consider this paragraph, which concludes a chapter:

(view spoiler)

This is obviously meant to be a very dramatic moment, but the way the paragraph is constructed takes away all of the suspense.

The Verdict: I would recommend this book to readers who have a fascination for archaeology, enjoy crime stories, and don't have a problem with subpar writing.

The Book Whisperer (aka Boof) says

Despite being a lover of crime fiction I hadn't heard of this book or author before I was invited to go to the Harrogate Crime Fiction Awards last month. Elly's book *The Crossing Places* had been shortlisted along with people like Ian Rankin and Mark Billingham and it was what she said on stage about her book having many layers that piqued my interest. What an accolade to have your book nominated and then shortlisted for such a high profile event as this, and I love that there was two debut authors on this list as it brings unknown authors to the fore. And thank goodness it does – I LOVED this book!

Ruth Galloway is in her late 30's, has cats, is slightly overweight and orders loads of books from Amazon (what's not to love?). She is a forensic archaeologist at the University of Norfolk, specialising in bones, and is called out to the saltmarshes on the Norfolk Coast by Police Detective Harry Nelson when a body is unearthed. The body is discovered to be that of a young girl from the iron age, but it brings to the surface the disappearance of a five year old girl, Lucy Downey, who has never been traced and whom Harry Nelson can't get out of his head. He then shows Ruth a series of letters he has been sent over the years with cryptic clues about Lucy's disappearance and asks Ruth to help him decipher them. In the midst of this, and almost 10 years to the day since Lucy vanished, a four year old girl is snatched from her back garden and Harry fears that the perpetrator has struck again.

What I loved most about this books is the setting and the characters. The saltmarshes on the north Norfolk coast sounded so bleak and wind swept that I longed to be there in Ruth's little stone cottage sipping coffee and reading books while rain hurled itself at the windows. I loved the image of the sand dunes and sea spray and the solitude. Ruth and Harry are wonderful leads too: Ruth is a woman after my own heart and Harry is a straight-talking northern bloke (and being a northerner myself I loved his tell-it-like-it-is attitude but also recognising his warm heart under his no nonsense exterior).

Reading this book made me want to do two things: 1) go for a long weekend on the north Norfolk coast – which we are now doing around my birthday in October and 2) want to rush out and buy the second in the series, *The Janus Stone* (which I have also now got and it is high on my pile!)

LJ says

First Sentence: They wait for the tide and set out at first light.

Archaeologist Ruth Galloway is a single, overweight woman who lives with her two cats on the edge of the Saltmarsh. DCI Harry Nelson asks for her help when human bones are found on a nearby beach. Nelson is haunted by the case of Lucy Downey, a young girl who disappeared ten years ago. A second child now disappears. Nelson believes the two cases are linked.

It is always a treat to start a book by an author I'd not previously read and discover it is a very enjoyable book.

The opening is particularly effective and creates a strong sense of place. In fact, it is the evocative quality of Ms. Griffiths' descriptions that entranced me and held me fast into the story. Add to that fascinating historical, geological, archeological and forensic information that enhances the story, but never overwhelms or slows it down.

The characters are only slightly less effective. I loved Ruth. She is definitely a character with whom I can identify. It is so refreshing not to have a young, slim, gorgeous protagonist. She is smart, strong and independent. A slight criticism would be that the author focused more than needed on Ruth's weight and being single. There's a point where you say, "Okay, I've got it."

Detective Nelson, on the other hand, seemed rather anachronistic in his view toward women and I was rather amazed at some of the things he didn't know, particularly with a British education. The other characters felt contrived.

I did guess the villain fairly early on, but there were enough twists and red herrings that I wasn't completely certain. There is an incident with one of Ruth's cats I felt was predictable and not really necessary to the plot.

The story does have a bit of a Gothic feel, which I enjoyed, and some very good suspense. It kept me reading from page one straight through in one sitting. I was surprised by the very ending, but not particularly in a good way.

Still, taken all together, the positives far outweighed the negatives and I look forward to more books by Ms. Griffiths.

THE CROSSING PLACES (Trad Mys-Ruth Galloway-England-Cont) – G+
Griffiths, Elly – 1st in series
Houghton, Mufflin, Harcourt, 2009, ARC – ISBN: 978-547339898

Ellen says

The Crossing Places by Elly Griffiths.

Ruth Galloway is not your usual conforming female. She's approaching 40 years old without having married or having any children. She is a forensic archaeologist employed as a professor at the local university outside of the London area. The local she chooses to call home is in quite a desolate place that some might consider gloomy. All in all Ruth Galloway is an independent woman who thinks for herself.

Ruth has a few friends (or so she thinks) that are also avidly interested in archaeological digs especially surrounding her home which has proven to be rich in the remains of cultures centuries old.

Detective Harry Nelson first enters Ruth's life while looking for assistance in recovering a child that had been kidnapped out of her home a number of years ago. At this point Detective Nelson strongly believes the child to be dead and realizes he needs the expertise of a forensic archaeologist to help identify any bones found.

This was a new series for me recommended on an online mystery group. It sounded interesting and proved to be just that. I found it to be original and filled with suspense.
