



The Inside Dark

James Hankins

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Length: 9 hrs and 15 mins

Five days ago, aspiring crime novelist Jason Swike awoke chained to the wall of a run-down horse stable, convinced he would soon die at the hands of Crackerjack, the infamous serial killer who had terrorized the residents of Massachusetts for the past year - capturing and tormenting men, painting whimsical designs on their faces before shattering their bones and ending their lives. Just when death seems inevitable, Jason, with the help of another captive, manages to kill the madman and escape.

Hailed as a hero, Jason reaps the benefits of his newfound fame: a book deal, a possible reconciliation with his estranged wife, and reward money he can use to pay for his son's costly medical treatments. But he soon realizes the nightmare that began in the deserted stable is far from over, as he is drawn into a twisted game where the darkest terror may not be the psychopath manipulating his every move, but what Jason may have to do to survive...

The Inside Dark Details

Date : Published July 11th 2017 by Thomas & Mercer

ISBN :

Author : James Hankins

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From Reader Review The Inside Dark for online ebook

Kathi Defranc says

A very interesting psychological thriller, with a pure sociopath thinking he needs to kill, with someone else watching, to feed the evil inside of him. This will keep the 'pain' away for awhile, when it starts again it is time for another gruesome killing... This story reels you in immediately, I just started to read to check how it goes and could not put the book down! There are some parts that are far-fetched, but the story and the feelings it gives you roll along. It comes down to what would you do, just how far would you go to keep yourself or your family alive? The 'inside dark' is in our killer, is there any in you?... I received a copy of this story and am able to give an honest review, with thanks to Netgalley, the author James Hankins and the publisher Thomas and Mercer.

Yellagirlgc says

This book review is going to require some thought. Sometimes I finish a book and just don't know what my real feelings for it are. Or how to put what I feel about it into words. So I'll just say to be continued.

I received a copy from the publisher and NetGalley for my review.

Chery1 says

"Some people were absolutely crazy. Some were just plain evil. And some were a whole lot of both."

I am a fan of author James Hankins. I've read all his books to date (at least that I know of) and enjoyed them all. I especially appreciate that they're all standalone novels and each unique.

In THE INSIDE DARK Jason Swike is a wannabe novelist in Massachusetts. He's written one book that ALMOST made it big but lately he's been copywriting to support the family he's separated from - not by his choice. Two years ago he was driving and got in a wreck that crippled his wife. His son has Down's Syndrome PLUS a rare deadly blood disease.

And to top it all off, for the last five days he's been chained to a deserted stable wall, not fed, given drugged water, and is at the mercy of the Crackerjack serial killer. I tell you, this guy didn't eat his Lucky Charms for breakfast.

But maybe his luck is changing because, with the help of another prisoner, he's able to escape a gruesome death and he might even be able to cash in on his new notoriety.

This is a fast-paced, action-packed thriller that kept my interest all the way through. I was able to figure out a couple of the twists ahead of time and Swike was a complicated character to like. It's not my favorite of Hankins books. That would probably be BROTHERS AND BONES. But I would have rated it 4 1/2 stars if I could have. It's well worth reading.

I received this book from Thomas and Mercer through Net Galley in exchange for my unbiased review.

Kathie says

1/21/18. This book was a daily deal today on audible so I looked to see if it was available at the library or at kindle unlimited. It's free through KU. I got to 28% (chapter 19) before I said no more. The premise is promising but the execution is bland. Bland is not a good adjective for suspense thrillers.

The main character, Jason Swike, is an unsuccessful mystery suspense writer who has a dead end cubicle job that he hates. He is kidnapped but doesn't remember how, just that one minute he was getting into his car and the next he is chained in a stable. Soon another guy, Ian Cobb, is chained near him but it's dark.

They talk but the author doesn't explain how swike knows they've been kidnapped by a serial killer nor the order people are killed. Actually, they escape the day Cobb is kidnapped, giving no time to build tension and fear. The escape itself is this distorted watered down action scene that is confusing and ends so quickly it's impossible a serial killer would be one with this level of ineptitude. I began to wonder if one of them was the serial killer and thought this would be a good way to move suspicion away. However, we read from both Cobbs and Swikes perspectives and realize that they were both kidnapped.

The book then turns to a woe is me life of Swike and his cold fishwife ex (technically his wife but they stayed married so she can have the house and his insurance while he can live alone and miserable in an apartment...who does that) and his stereotypical mother in law who moved into his house with her daughter and treats him like an unwanted guest in his house. The other guy is taking care of his dad who is in a vegetative state. Neither have great lives.

It became so boring I just had to stop but not before I skipped ahead to read the conclusion.

Zannie (darktwistybooks) says

Review coming soon

Sarah Joint says

When you begin this book, there will be a part where you think you realize where it's going... and you may be right. But what happens next will likely throw you for a loop. **This is a nail-biter, and a fantastic introduction (for me) to this author.** My rating is a 4.5, bumped up to a 5. It came very close. It's a very twisted tale. It's the best book I've read recently, very clever and unbelievably unnerving and twisted.

James has spent five days shackled to a wall in a barn. No food. Just a single bottle of water left for him every day. He hasn't seen the man that's taken him, and the drugs he put in the water are making him confused and exhausted... but he knows who he is. **He's Crackerjack, a serial killer who has become famous around these parts. This psycho kidnaps and murders men, leaving them with multiple broken bones and a painted face. How whimsical.** The killer seems to appreciate his moniker... Jason listens, terrified, as he hums "take me out to the ballgame" as he brutalizes another man in the barn. He knows he's

next. His time has come.

Or at least... a time has come. Two men topple into his stall, directly on top of him. A man named Ian managed to get the upper hand with Crackerjack, but he's spent. It's up to James to finish the job... and he does.

The two men are considered local heroes. Ian doesn't welcome it, but James figures out how to use it to his advantage. He's a struggling crime fiction writer... He's written about crazies like Crackerjack before. **A real account of defeating a serial killer would sell millions. It may even bring the wife he's separated from back into his arms and help pay for medicine his special needs son desperately needs. One couldn't blame him for selling his story, or maybe even adding a little extra to it... could they?**

As it turns out, his troubles are far from over. **While he sees huge paydays and his family coming together again in his future, his future may hold nothing at all... because the terror is far from over. To save himself, he might have to do some terrible, unforgivable things...**

I received an ARC of this book from Net Galley and Thomas & Mercer, thank you! My review is honest and unbiased.

Frances says

Mixed feelings about this , a lot of the time it was rather thrilling , other times a bit rediculous, but still kept you wondering how's he going to get out of this.

3 1/2 stars from me

Whitney says

Okay...

So I finished this book quickly enough (meaning it was easy to make progress), but it was...*disappointing*. Like really disappointing.

I had hoped for more from this book before beginning it, and maybe that's partly why I was expecting something much different and ended up having my hopes dashed.

Either way, not a huge fan.

First, I found the main character weak. Not just weak, but greedy and full of self-pity.

That makes for a bad combination, and it easily annoyed me throughout the first third or so of the book.

I kept wanting to reach through the pages of the book and strangle Jason myself. He just went on and on and on about his poor, sad life and the fact that nobody (translation: his frigid, judgmental wife) loved him or wanted him or understood him. Boohoo! Deal with it.

Second, while the premise was arguably unusual, it still managed to fall flat, not just throughout the book, but at the conclusion as well.

I had honestly expected the author to give it more zip--an incredibly shocking reason behind the killer's killings, grislier descriptions of the murder scenes (this is a suspense-thriller type book, after all!), even a more creative MO and signature would have sufficed. The whole Crackerjack name and the face painting thing was just absurd and not at all terrifying.

Third, the conclusion. It was totally anticlimactic. Very run-of-the-mill stuff.

In this type of book, you (the reader) know the main character is going to live, so you (the author) better pep it up with an ending that has readers hanging onto every word....or at the very least, interested in what happens next.

By the time the story reached its finale, I could not have cared less if Jason lived or died, and that's hard for me to admit as someone who tries very hard to give the main character every benefit of the doubt in a book. I just had a difficult time relating to and feeling sorry for Jason.

He was *just* flawed enough for me to think "meh" when wondering about his fate.

Lastly, I had really hoped that the author would play up the part about Jason and the hitchhiker on the highway. What if it **had** been intentional? What if the Inside Dark **truly was** inside Jason, and Crackerjack had been right all along? Now, **that** would have made for an interesting story, and one the author should have explored more!

Points do go to the author, though, for the idea behind Crackerjack's motives for killing. The whole voyeurism thing was just creepy enough to keep me turning the page. Although not entirely original, it was, admittedly, something I had not yet read in a suspense-thriller story, and I can appreciate that fact.

Overall, a decent book. Not one to pick up if you're looking for something that'll keep you up at night or make you want to gush to friends and family, but an interesting concept and worth reading if you have the time to spare.

Note: This ARC was kindly provided by NetGalley and the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Malina Skrobosinski says

I received an advanced copy of this novel from NetGalley for my honest review.

James Hankins, The Prettiest One was the first novel I ever received from Kindle First, from that moment on, I fell in love with James Hankins writing. He's a captivating storyteller; from the first page, you become hooked.

At the start of The Inside Dark we discover that Jason Swike, a published author and family man, is chained to a stable wall. He's been held captive for four days without food, and barely any water... water that has been drugged to keep Jason submissive. Jason soon realizes that his captor is none other than the notorious Crackerjack; a serial killer who is known for killing his victims by breaking several of their bones and painting their faces and then leaving them in a ditch to be discovered. Jason discovers he's not alone, in the stable next to him is Ian Cobb, a local plumber. Ian and Jason strike up a conversation, but Jason can barely stay awake, the lack of food, dehydration, and drugs have left him so tired and barely able to focus. As Jason slumps to the stable floor he hears it... the whistling. He now knows that Crackerjack is back. He hears a whack and then a scream of pain and terror. He realizes, his new friend Ian is not going to survive this ordeal, and with that, neither would he. Jason soon drifts off, but he is suddenly awoken by two men who

come crashing into his stable and falling on top of him. As Jason begins to regain focus on the situation he hears a man pleading for help. Jason realizes it's Ian, he's still alive, but how? A struggle ensues and Jason manages to come to the rescue by killing Crackerjack with several blows to the head with a hammer.

Jason and Ian have escaped the notorious serial killer Crackerjack. They are dubbed local heroes by the media and local residents. Ian tells the police and the media that Jason is the real hero, that he saved him. Jason on the other hand felt as though he would have never been able to stop Crackerjack if Ian hadn't gotten one up on him. Ian says they're a team... they did it together. Things start to look up for Jason, he's got a book deal in the works, possibly a movie, and he was gifted 100,000, for killing Crackerjack. Make that 200,000 after Ian decides that Jason deserves his portion of the money. Yes, things are looking really good for Jason. That is, until he stands to lose it all. Jason and Ian begin another journey together, one that will show them exactly what the inside dark looks like.

From the beginning James Hankins has you hooked, that's what he does. I also know that there is always a twist. Early on I could see where things were headed, almost from the start, I was interested to see how this story was going to play out. I kept saying to myself "Okay James, where are you taking this?". The part I struggled with was how is it that Jason could never seem to get out of the mess he was facing? There were several times I kept thinking to myself... you idiot, why didn't you do this or that? (I'll spare you details as to not reveal anything). That aside, I really enjoyed this, just as I have with other James Hankins novels. It's fast paced, the characters are well developed, some may say too developed. It's twisted, captivating, and maybe even heroic.

Rebekka says

Entertaining enough, but very predictable. And the main character was a simpering idiot.

Bex Rees says

So, I just finished watching this series of Love Island (I know...doesn't say much for my character!) I would liken 'The Inside Dark' to the book version of Love Island - although with less bikinis and more serial killer violence. I don't want to give too much away as there is quite a lot of action in this book, but briefly, it's about a crime novelist, Jason Swike who escapes from a twisted serial killer and what happens next. I wouldn't say it's brilliantly written, but I could not stop reading it! The story itself is exciting enough, but I was mildly irritated by the ridiculous decisions the main character Jason made. When faced with a tricky scenario, he always made questionable choices. The reasoning behind the serial killer's motives was also dubious. However, once I decided to just go with the craziness of this book, I quite enjoyed it - 3.5 stars, but rounded down as not a 4 for me. There's nothing wrong with car crash reading every now and then though, so if you're after a quick read with lots of twists and turns, this is probably a good one.

Judy Collins says

Acclaimed author, James Hankins returns following *The Prettiest One* (2016) with his latest edgy psychological crime thriller, with gruesome evil secrets of the past —**THE INSIDE DARK**. Top 20 Summer Books Coming July.

Psychologically rich, taut, fast-paced suspense, with twists around every corner, Hawkins will keep you guessing until the conclusion.

What drives a person to kill?

Set in the Boston area, **Jason Swike**, is a crime, mystery, suspense novelist – married to Sophie with a six-year-old son, Max (Down syndrome and blood disease). There was a car accident leaving her in a wheelchair, and the couple (separated/estranged for two years).

As the novel opens Jason has been chained to the wall of an old horse corral in a deserted, ramshackle stable. He was given no food, and only water, mixed with drugs.

When would death arrive?

Death enjoys what it does. Death likes to whistle while it works.

“Take me out to the ballgame. *Buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack.*”

Death has a name.

Headlines. The most feared in Massachusetts. The media had dubbed Death’s latest human incarnation, Crackerjack—because serial killers with catchy monikers grab more viewers and sell more papers than ordinary killers do.

Crackerjack broke bones—cracked, snapped, twisted, or crushed. Then the final death blow. Death has humor. . .

Three strikes you’re out. Crackerjack had clearly taken his media-given nickname to heart.

Death had an odd sense of whimsy.

In addition to broken bones, all his victims had been found with their faces adorned with skillfully rendered designs, like those you pay for at an amusement park or carnival. From superheroes, fairies, wild animals, and cartoon characters.

Soon death would come whistling for him.

Jason learns he is not alone in the stable. There is another man being tortured. Ian Cobb. He heard the whistling and knew Death would come for the other man, Ian. Then he would be next. *The last sound heard by his victims.*

During the torture, he could hear the pleading for him to help. He had to help him. Soon the struggle stumbled into his stall. A life-and-death battle with a serial killer, taking place literally on top of him.

With the help of Cobb, Jason takes down Crackerjack, (Wallace Barton) the sadistic serial killer who whistled as he tortured his victims. Cobb even had the similar face painted design.

Jason had killed him with the hammer (the final blow), but it was self-defense. He had struck him three times.

Soon there is much success for Jason. He is a hero. They were both lucky. Jason got away without a scratch; however, not Cobb. Why did CrackerJack keep Jason around longer?

Briggs is the homicide detective. Jason and Ian were the only ones who had escaped the serial killer. There were six bodies buried in the woods behind the serial killers stable bringing the total to sixteen. Briggs is suspicious of Jason's story. Something does not add up.

Soon Jason enjoys the limelight and his book sales soar. In less than forty hours he had a six-figure offer in hand from a major publisher for a non-fiction book about Jason's ordeal and his eventual escape. Then were two Hollywood producers. Life is good.

What if he stretched the truth, embellished a bit—to get the job done. Would it be so wrong to lie a little? He had a wife in a wheelchair from a car accident (which he was to blame), and a son with expensive medical needs. Jason needed to lie a little during the TV interview. He required book sales. His family had medical needs, and he needed to win them back.

Cobb takes a backseat. Cobb takes care of his elderly father at home. He owns a plumbing business which his father had started, and he had shared with his brother John until his death. Half of his income went to nursing care, doctor visits, medical supplies, and equipment.

What is Cobb hiding?

Ian gives up his part of the reward to Jason. However, Jason soon learns all this comes with strings. Both men had been taken from an empty parking lot and drugged. Both have family medical problems and a tragic past.

Then later his nightmare begins once again.

He hears the whistling again . . .

Did he kill the real killer? Was there a copycat? Is the real killer still out there?

More bodies surface.

Jason has some secrets of his own. He desperately needs the money, with his own son's medical needs with a rare blood disease (aHUS) and the possibility of facing a future of dialysis and even kidney transplants. His care is costly.

Cobb also has a creepy disturbing past which shapes his life. Each is blaming someone else in their lives for their behavior. Both these men have some things in common (both suffered catastrophes), and Detective Lamar Briggs knows something is not right and will not stop until he gets answers.

Jason is worried about his own family. If the killer is still at large, he needs to hire his own hit man. How far will Swike go to sell books, and to resuscitate a drowning career as a crime writer? He cannot let the killer get to him and his family.

Two different car accidents trigger a dangerous chain of events. Jason is drawn into a twisted game while the psychopath killer is pulling all the strings.

Time to let **The Inside Dark** out . . .

From an abandoned horse stable to a motel. A nightmarish journey of madness, evil, to sadistic—a cleverly written twisty, tense, suspenseful, creepy thriller!

This crackerjack suspense hits a home run!

An avid fan of talented Hawkins, from his first book to this latest, have enjoyed his writing immensely crossing many genres. Each book is unique—from mystery, suspense, crime, and psychological thrillers.

For fans of *Jennifer Hillier, Lisa Unger, and Paul Cleave* (other favorites). The author knows creepy, torture, revenge, and twisted minds. **THE INSIDE DARK** is a "must read" terrifying cat-and-mouse game. Wickedly evil for your summer reading pleasure.

If you have not read James Hankins, what are you waiting for? Also highly recommend the audiobook (an engaging performance) narrated by Bon Shaw.

Read my reviews:

The Prettiest One

Shady Cross (Top 50 Books of 2015)

Brothers and Bones

Drawn

Jack of Spades

A special thank you to Thomas and Mercer, and NetGalley for an early reading copy.

JDCMustReadBooks

Petra says

Decent, fast-paced thriller, but I didn't find it as dark or suspenseful as many other readers. A bit predictable and I wasn't invested enough in any of the characters. Good audio narration.

Carri says

Eh, it was ok. Really in need of more editing and cleaning up. Good concept, underwhelming execution.

Joann says

I won this e-book in a Goodreads Giveaway - "The Inside Dark" by James Hankins. This is definitely a dark thriller and I finished the book and it was just an OK read for me. I just couldn't relate to the "good guy" or anyone in his family. There was something missing for me. I did figure out the twist about half way through but I wanted to make sure he got his comeuppance! It's written with a question or comment from a person and then a few pages later, there is the other person's comment so that means you can skip through a lot of

the dialogue which is what I did.
