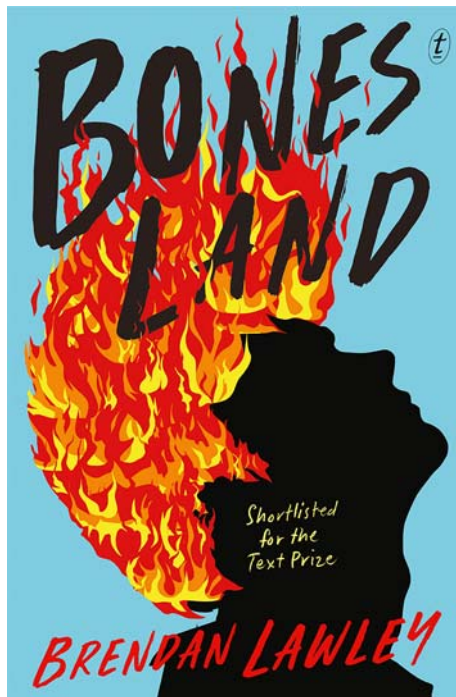


Bonesland



Bonesland
Brendan Lawley
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A To an older, white male living in a 'genteel' suburb of Melbourne (Australia), some other suburbs and some rural towns can look and sound like a foreign country. *Bonesland* unfolds in such a 'foreign' setting.

Most of the characters are teenagers, in themselves members of a foreign group to this reader. The narrator, a sixteen-year-old white boy, 'suffers' from a form of OCD and may be somewhere on the autism spectrum or have mild Asperger's. He has an older brother and a collection of disparate friends. One of these, Jimmy, mostly talks like an American rapper. Throw into this an older boy who relentlessly bullies Bones and an African-American female exchange student, and Brendan Lawley creates a potent first novel.

As a writer myself, I am often asked what age group my stories are suitable for. I can usually give a lower age limit but find it more difficult to nominate an upper range; after all, at seventy I still enjoy 'YA' novels. *Bonesland* is hard to pigeonhole – because of the overt descriptions of characters' experimentation and experience with drugs and sex, a lower limit of fifteen years may be appropriate. The upper limit? This depends on how much 'bad' language and explicit sex you are willing to read.

The narration being in the first person gives the reader access to one teenager's thoughts, feelings and angsts. Happily, other characters are fleshed out and mostly well-rounded. We also are, eventually, given insights into what has driven, or at least contributed to, some of the characters behaving and thinking the way they do – including Bones and his nemesis, Shitty.

Lawley does not hold back in describing various characters' sexual experiences and their experimentation with and, in some cases, excessive use of alcohol and other drugs. He also explores the vagaries of relationships and the difficulties inherent in navigating them.

I wouldn't describe this novel as entertaining – it is more of a difficult journey through the rough terrain that is adolescence. There is much in this that will speak eloquently to those navigating that terrain, as well as resonating for those who have already left it behind, whether they did so successfully or not.