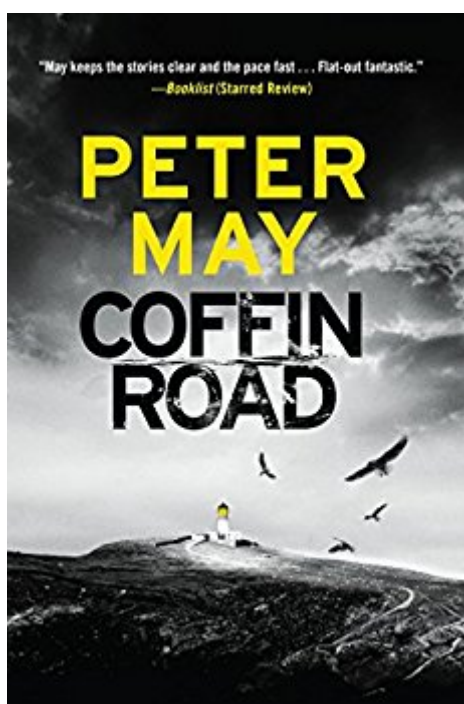


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Coffin Road



Synopsis

In his latest mystery set in Scotland and the Outer Hebrides, award-winning author Peter May spins a tale about three disparate cases that may or may not be linked...On the remote Isle of Harris in Scotland's Outer Hebrides, a man washes up on a deserted beach, hypothermic and completely disoriented. He has no idea who he is or how he got there. The only clue to his condition is a map of the island showing a desolate, ancient path called the Coffin Road. With a sense of dread and no clear idea what lies at the other end, he knows he must follow the trail if he has any hope of discovering his identity. Meanwhile, homicide detective George Gunn makes the rough ocean crossing to a remote, sea-battered lighthouse on a rock in the northern Atlantic, twenty miles west of the Outer Hebrides, to investigate a brutal murder. Despite its isolation, the tiny island has seen its share of tragedy: more than a century earlier, three lighthouse keepers disappeared, never to be seen or heard from again. And now there is a new tragedy, and Gunn must figure out what happened. At the same time, a teenage girl lies in her Edinburgh bedroom, desperate to discover the truth about her father's death. Two years after the discovery of the pioneering scientist's suicide note, Karen Fleming still cannot accept that her father would willingly abandon her. And the more she discovers about the nature of his research, the more she suspects that suicide had nothing to do with it.

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Customer Reviews

In *Coffin Road*, Peter May returns to the setting of the Outer Hebrides, familiar to readers of his Lewis trilogy (*The Blackhouse*, *The Lewis Man* and *The Chessmen*). *Coffin Road* is a stand-alone novel though, and not really connected to the trilogy; except through the landscape, and also the re-appearance of detective sergeant George Gunn from that series as supporting character. The book starts with a man being washed up on an empty beach – gradually coming to his senses, but realising that not only does he not have any idea where he is – he does not even know who he is. He seems to have lost all memories to do with his own self. The first person he meets after getting up on his feet turns out to be someone who seems to know him, though; and without revealing the extent of his own confusion, he learns that he in fact lives quite close, and manages to get back home to his cottage. He hopes that familiar surroundings will help him retrieve his memories of who he is, and what happened to him. This, however, turns out to be a lot more complicated than expected, as the house as well as his computer appear to be completely void of any personal documents or other memorabilia. Finding the lost pieces of the puzzle and putting them together proves to be slow and tricky process. Some things seem familiar, and yet he does not know how to interpret them and make it all fit. He also has to deal with a hovering fear at the back of his mind that he may have done something terrible that he should not have; and that he does not even know himself what he might be capable of. The title, *Coffin Road*, refers to a route used in the past to carry the dead from the rocky east coast of the Isle of Harris over to the west side for burial in the deeper soil there.

A man is washed ashore, exhausted and with no idea of how he got there, or indeed where 'there' is. He has lost his memory, but is filled with a sense of dread as if something terrible has happened. As he staggers up the road, he is met by a neighbour who calls him by his name – Neal Maclean – and helps him to the cottage that is apparently his home. But when Neal begins to look for indications of who he is and what he's doing in this remote cottage on a Hebridean island, he can find no information about himself – even his computer seems to contain no history. But his dog Bran is happy to have him back, and when his other neighbours, Sally and Jon, turn up for a prearranged drink, it appears Sally in particular is a close friend... This book sees May returning to the Hebrides, this time on Harris rather than Lewis (same island – different ends). However there's a different feel to this one – Neal is an incomer to the island and doesn't really get involved much with the local community. The landscape, or rather seascape, plays a huge part though and, as always, May's sense of place and descriptive writing bring it to life. The bulk of the book is written

from Neal's perspective as he struggles to work out what has happened to him. His sections are in first person present tense which, though still not to my taste, makes some kind of sense here, since Neal is effectively a man without a past, and happily May is more than skilled enough to avoid the clunkiness that often afflicts present tense writing. The rest of it is written in third person past. From things that Sally and Jon tell him, Neal discovers he's apparently writing a book on the story of three lighthouse keepers who mysteriously disappeared many years ago from the otherwise uninhabited Flannan Isles.

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