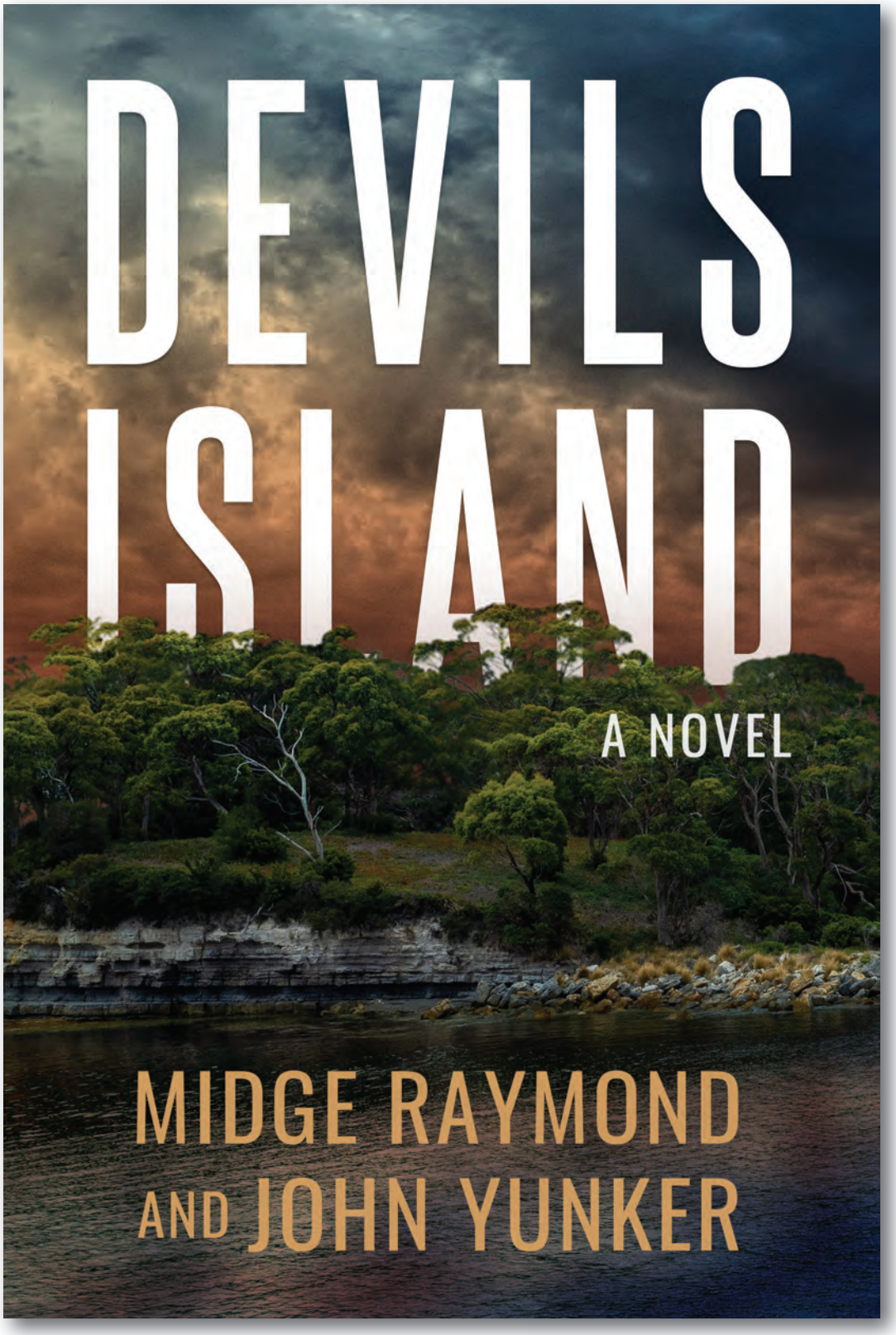
Book Club Kit



Suggested Discussion Questions

- Acting—on stage and in life—is a theme throughout the novel. In what ways do each of the characters pretend or perform, whether for themselves or for others? How does this affect the authenticity of their lives and their relationships?

- Kerry's work with endangered species has affected her mental health. For a naturalist—or a climate scientist, or anyone working in an environmental field—what makes it possible to face difficult realities and still have hope?

- Brooke and Jane share a codependent friendship—perhaps even, as Brooke notes, a *folie à deux* (shared madness). How does this both help and hinder each of them?

- The travelers on this journey are all there for different reasons, and they don't all share the same thirst for adventure. How adventurous are you when you travel? Are your travel partners at the same level of thrill-seeking and/or risk-taking? How do you manage these differences? And how do the characters in *Devils Island* handle their differences?

- Kerry mentions that the healthy Tasmanian devils on Marbury Island sometimes eat the eggs of Cape Barren geese. To what extent is it acceptable to save one species at the expense of others?

- Kerry and Brooke are both getting over failed relationships. In what ways does their journey on Marbury Island help them recover?

- At times, Facebook is the only way Brooke and Jane stay in touch—and as Brooke notes, "Facebook is the biggest stage of all." How does social media distort the realities of people's lives and relationships?

- On Marbury Island, the poaching of rare and endemic bird eggs is a concern. In what other parts of the world is poaching an issue, and who are the animals affected?

- As the luxury "glamping" trip devolves into survivalism, how do the characters respond and how do their relationships evolve? Does the threat of death reflect positively or poorly on the characters as the novel progresses?

- How does the loss of a cellphone signal raise the tension, not only in the novel, but in the lives of the characters? Though the characters believed they wanted to escape from civilization on this journey, how does it ultimately affect them to be entirely cut off?

- The naming (and nicknaming) of animals can play a huge role in how humans perceive and relate to them. Would Tasmanian devils, had they been known as, say, Tasmanian rascals, have been so readily feared and discounted as a native pest? Even today, does the nickname help or hurt the protection of this endangered species?

About "Marbury Island"

Marbury Island is the fictional version of Maria Island/ Wukaluwikiwayna, located off the coast of the Australian state of Tasmania. The island is part of the Maria Island National Park and stretches roughly 12 miles long.

In *Devils Island*, the hikers arrived at the isthmus and camped there the first night, with a side trip to Haunted Bay. The only public access to and from the island is by the Maria Island ferry at the Darlington Probation Station (the real-life town of Darlington is called "Saltwick" in the novel).

About the Trek

Here's a glimpse of what the trek was like for the hikers in *Devils Island*, including the campsites, dining tent, hikers making their way along the coastline, and the ominous Haunted Bay sign.

Q&A with Midge & John

Q: What inspired you to write *Devils Island*?

A: *Devils Island* was inspired by a trip similar to the one in the book—eight people (though in the book there are six), mostly strangers, on a guided backpacking trip on a remote and isolated island. It was a wonderful and uneventful journey, but the setting and circumstances captured our imagination. The real-life island, like the fictional one in the book, is a refuge for endangered Tasmanian devils, and this inspired the book as well. We could hear the devils at night and hoped to see one, but they remained elusive.

Q: How did you use your life experience or professional background to enrich your story?

A: As longtime writers and former journalists, we do lots of research. Our books, while entirely fictional, are inspired by real experiences, usually related to travel, wildlife, and the environment. We especially admire and appreciate the work of naturalists who have inspired many of our characters.

Q: What part of writing *Devils Island* did you find the most challenging?

A: Writing *Devils Island* actually went surprisingly well because the two of us make a good team. Midge finds the blank page challenging, but John is an idea man and loves a blank page. John finds details and revision unappealing, if not impossible, and Midge loves both. We divide and conquer.

Q: What do you hope readers will take away from your book?

A: We hope readers will come away with an appreciation of an endangered species and an appreciation of how important protecting biodiversity is to our planet as a whole. We also hope they'll enjoy the adventure.

Q: What is the best piece of advice about writing you have ever received?

A: "Write drunk, edit sober," said Ernest Hemingway.

Q: What is the worst piece of advice about writing you've ever received?

A: "Never show your writing to your spouse," said John's favorite professor in graduate school.

Q: Is *Devils Island* based on a real place?

A: Yes, Marbury Island is the fictional version of Maria Island (pronounced *Mariah*), located off the coast of the Australian state of Tasmania. Like our fictional island, Maria Island formerly housed a convict settlement, and it is now mostly national park. Other than the main town of Darlington, which has ferry service, much of the island is remote, isolated, and requires permits to visit. It is uninhabited except for the presence of park rangers in Darlington.

Q: Why did you fictionalize the island?

A: We decided to fictionalize the island so we could be free to change details to fit the story. Also, the trip that inspired the novel was fabulous in every way—from the guides to our fellow travel companions—and fictionalizing the place, we hope, will help ensure that everyone who was with us knows that the characters are in no way based on them, and that no one wanted to kill them.

Q: Are you working on a new writing project together?

A: Yes! We've recently finished another mystery, *Fire Season*, set in Southern California, about a couple who moves across the country for a fresh start, only to encounter a dead body on a nearby trail who turns out to be someone with connections to long-buried secrets of the past.

Meet the Tasmanian Devil

Facts about the Tasmanian Devil

- Tasmanian devils are the world's largest surviving carnivorous marsupial.
- Tasmanian devils can eat up to 40 percent of their body weight in 30 minutes.
- The jaws of Tasmanian devils can open up to 80 degrees.
- Tasmanian devils have the highest relative bite force of living mammals. A 10-kg devil has a bite as powerful as a 40-kg dog.

- Tasmanian devils can smell a dead body from half a mile away.
- Tasmanian devils live to be 6 years old in the wild.
- Tasmanian devils are nocturnal and can roam up to up to 16 km in one night.
- Tasmanian devils can run at nearly 25 km/h for up to 1 km. They can run at 10 km/h for longer distances.
- Tasmanian devils have 11 distinct vocalizations. They also snore and sigh. They got their name from the unearthly screams that frightened European settlers.
- Tasmanian devils have ears with thin skin and little fur, so when they are stressed or excited the ears flush and appear red.

Meet the Animals of Tasmania

In addition to Tasmanian devils, Maria Island is home to many other marsupials, including (from right, clockwise), kangaroos, wallabies, pademelons, and wombats.

Meet the Animals of Tasmania

Maria Island is also home to myriad bird species including (from below to right) the kookaburra (related to kingfishers), yellow-tailed black cockatoo, flame robin, and the Cape Barren goose.

About the Authors

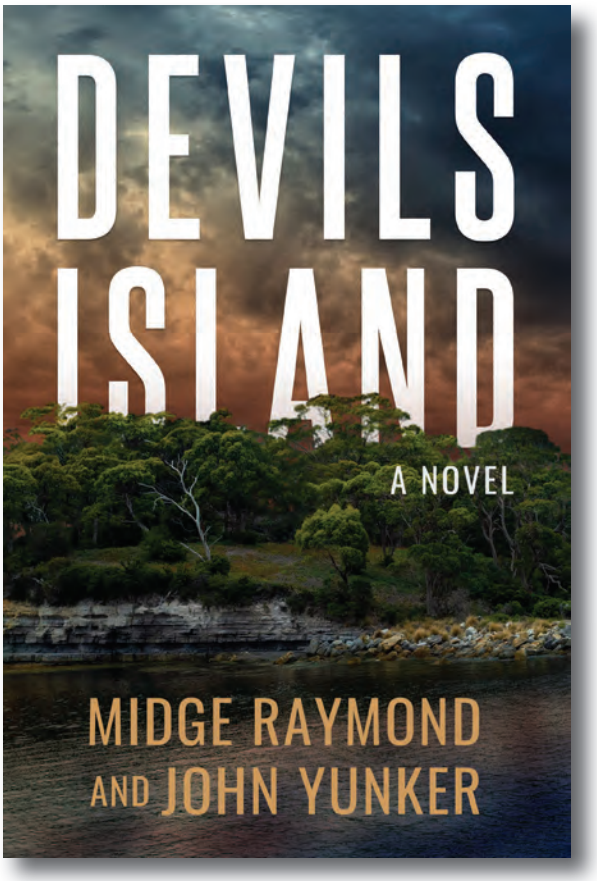
Devils Island is the debut collaboration by the writing duo Midge Raymond and John Yunker.

Midge Raymond is the author of the novels *Floreana* and *My Last Continent* and the award-winning short-story collection *Forgetting English*. Her writing has appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *American Literary Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Poets & Writers*, and other publications. She has taught writing at Boston University and at Boston's Grub Street Writers; Seattle's Richard Hugo House; San Diego Writers, Ink; and at writing conferences around the world. She earned a certificate in private investigation from the University of Washington.

John Yunker writes plays, short stories, and novels. He is the author of the novel *The Tourist Trail*; editor of the *Among Animals* fiction series and a nonfiction anthology, *Writing for Animals*; and his plays have been produced or staged at such venues as the Oregon Contemporary Theatre, the Source Festival, the Centre Stage New Play Festival, and Association for Theatre in Higher Education conference. His teleplay *Sanctuary* was performed at the Compassion Arts Festival in New York, and his short stories have been published in *Phoebe*, *Qu*, *Flyway* and other journals.

www.MidgeandJohn.com

Praise for *Devils Island*



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"Buckle up for a compelling and brilliant twist on the locked room mystery. A luxurious adventure among kangaroos and Tasmanian devils on a tiny remote island turns deadly when a secretive tourist goes missing. *Devils Island* isn't just a compulsively readable mystery; it's also a vital meditation on what it means to live through extinction in all its forms. I will not forget my visit to *Devils Island* anytime soon."

— Mindy Mejia, *USA Today* bestselling author of *To Catch a Storm* and *Everything You Want Me to Be*

"A crafty devil of a whodunit, this perfect blend of environmental and suspense fiction, atmospheric and rife with intrigue, will scare the devil out of you—and make you fall in love with the misunderstood, endangered Tasmanian devil. *Devils Island* is at once a riveting mystery and an eloquent plea to protect our natural world."

— A. J. Banner, #1 Kindle, *Publishers Weekly*, and *USA Today* bestselling author

"This one is loaded with all the danger, treachery and action a reader could wish for. Throw in the exotic location of Tasmania and you have all the makings of a terrific thriller. You never quite catch your breath as all of the secrets are revealed."

— Steve Berry, *New York Times* and #1 internationally bestselling author of *The Atlas Maneuver* and the Cotton Malone series

www.MidgeandJohn.com