



# Bait

*J. Kent Messum*

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## **Bait** J. Kent Messum

No one is coming to your aid. We have ensured this.

Six strangers wake up on a remote island in the Florida Keys with no memory of their arrival. They soon discover their common bond: all of them are heroin addicts. As the first excruciating pangs of withdrawal make themselves felt, the six notice a yacht anchored across open water. On it lurk four shadowy figures, protected by the hungry sharks that patrol the waves. So begins a dangerous game. The six must undertake the impossible—swim to the next island where a cache of heroin awaits, or die trying. When alliances form, betrayal is inevitable. As the fight to survive intensifies, the stakes reach terrifying heights—and their captors' motives finally begin to emerge.

## **Bait Details**

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Author : J. Kent Messum

Format : Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Horror, Thriller, Fiction, Mystery, Adventure, Survival, Suspense

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## From Reader Review Bait for online ebook

**Erin \*Proud Book Hoarder\* says**

4.5 stars

A small group of unlucky souls are gathered up and deposited on an island, told with directions to go to the next adjoining land by crossing the dangerous inlets so they can receive their new doses of heroine, food and other essential goodies. They have to figure out how to work together - or work apart - to survive and get that next fix and avoid being shark bait.

Several of my friends have been reading this one, reviewing it highly, so I was happy to dive in - plus, Sharks? We are so fascinated by the swimming predators still. I blame JAWS.

These chompers aren't great whites, but it doesn't matter since a scary shark is a scary shark. The group have addiction and downward spiral in common. They've all hit rock bottom and done the nasty to survive there, which the men who are puppeteers know. Both groups are interesting. I can't warm up to killers who want to watch victims being torn apart by killer sea creatures, of course, but the villainous motivation is a plausible one that's not shallow. Drug addiction doesn't deliver the friendliness trait but some of victims have compassion while others just lack it.

The book is short - would have liked an even longer water romp - but it delivered the goods in a fast paced and hard to put down story. There's some mini flashbacks to give a show of who the characters are and how they ended up in this mess, which was needed to keep the book's characters three-dimensional. There's not a huge mystery as it's easy for them to figure out what's going on, but they have to depend on timing, plans and each other to see if they can survive this one.

I won't say whether anyone survived, but the ending was a nice conclusion and it leaves with that dangling hook on what will come next. Not a cliffhanger, but something to ponder.

Fast-paced and intriguing, this is a shark book cut above the rest, focusing on the group of heroin addicts more than just a B-fest killer shark rush. There's more than a few sharks munching - there's social stigma pondering, the banes of addiction and the merits of those struggling with it, a few creepy and suspenseful parts in the water (always a scary setting in itself). Suspense fans should definitely hunt this one down - it's a keeper.

An honest review has been dished out after receiving this book from the author

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**Kelly (and the Book Boar) says**

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

**Needles are squicky, so I'm gonna ignore that part of the story and SHARK THE SHIT out of this review instead!!!!**

A ~~couple of years~~ long time ago I was just your average wife and mother who opted to read a lot of fluffy nonsense in my downtime. Then a bad influence came into my life . . .

Instead of reading stuff like *Twilight*, he encouraged me to read the darker side of fiction. When Mitchell saw there was a book all about smack/tar/chiba/horse (a/k/a heroin if you're not a complete nutter like my pal), he was in. When he told me *Bait* also featured a supporting cast of characters in the form of sharks, I was in as well.

*Bait* is the story of six people, previously unknown to each other (but all of whom share the common bond of heroin addiction) who wake up on an island in the Keys. Battling withdrawal, they piece their stories together to figure out the hows, whys, whens, wheres, and whos of the circumstances that led up to ending where they did. Once that part of the puzzle is solved, the six are forced to make a terrifying decision . . . swim through shark infested waters to the next island where they will receive more drugs and a possible chance for survival or stay where they are and die.

And that's where the getting gets good, my friends. Let's face facts – we're dealing with a bunch of addicts here. There's not gonna be a whole lot going on in the character development department. The real stars of this show are the sharks! God I love sharks. They're so cuddly and adorable . . .

Just me? Alrighty then.

Anywho, these suckers (the humans, not the sharks) are **deep** into the drug scene. There's no way they aren't going to try to get to the stash on the next island. You know what that means?

Wheeeeeeeeeeeee!

I pity the fool who has to go against these mother\*&^%#s 'cause they are **HUNGRY!**

Let's hope all the humanfolk don't end up served at my fave restaurant . . .

This book obviously isn't for everyone. It is gritty and gory and everything foul that I like when choosing a book that everyone else will probably end up hating. I flagged a bunch of quotes and "memorable moments," if you will, but now that I'm writing this up I've decided to skip it and only mention a couple of things. First – Messum has used this tactic of ending one chapter with the same sentence or idea that begins the next chapter. Call me a sucker for a good gimmick, but that one really worked for me and tied everything together very well. Second – as strange as this sounds, *Bait* could spark one of the best "book clubby" type of discussions of any book I've read recently. I love dealing with the question of what is right and what is wrong and who is good and who is evil. This book is one that will leave you with a strong opinion on those subjects.

Basically, if a book about junkies maybe getting eaten by sharks sounds like your idea of a good time, check out *Bait*. You probably won't be disappointed. And hey, even if you don't like it the bonus is it is really short and reads **super** fast.

And also? Dear Olympic Committee:

Yes, please. Consider this a formal request.

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## **Trudi says**

**I'm floating this review from last summer to offer my congratulations to the author. BAIT is the 2014 recipient of the Arthur Ellis Award for Best First Novel.**

You know, the thing about a shark...he's got lifeless eyes. Black eyes. Like a doll's eyes. When he comes at ya, doesn't seem to be living... until he bites ya ~*JAWS (1975)*

The **perfect beach read** (for my twisted tastes anyway) found as summer's door closes on the Sunday of Labor Day Weekend. The book's blurb describes BAIT as: "Survivor meets Lord of the Flies meets Drugstore Cowboy" and that's pretty accurate as blurbs go, with a side portion of *Trainspotting* to sweeten the deal.

Subtract the worst of *SAW*'s gory torture-porn aspects, I also couldn't help be reminded of it as well -- oh yes ladies and gentlemen, BAIT is a winner, a white-knuckled page-turner with a gaping maw of shark's teeth ready to take a chomp out of your ass at any moment. I'd love to see this as a movie, and its length would have made it the perfect one hour *Twilight Zone* or *Night Gallery* episode.

The novel works so well because Messum takes some time (amidst the roiling action) to develop his cast of sad, deplorable and desperate characters. As readers, what are we to think of protagonists plagued by heroin addiction and the jagged guilt of dirty deeds?

The six victims who wake up stranded on a deserted beach are not the people we usually cheer for. It's hard to warm up to them, and unless you've suffered from addiction yourself, it's very hard to relate to them in any way. Despite this challenge, Messum takes what could have easily resulted in stereotypical junkies -- no archetypes or caricatures here -- and turns them into sympathetic characters, nicely fleshed out in a short period of time with minimal details.

On the surface, BAIT is a thrill-kill, adrenaline read, a man versus nature versus man extravaganza. But beneath the surface, there is deep water that runs, not just with sharks, but with thematic purpose tinged with social commentary and observations of the human condition -- our rage, our prejudices, our lack of empathy and understanding, our human ability to dehumanize ourselves and others around us. In some respects, this cautionary tale has an allegorical feel to it all, about justice and second chances and who deserves them.

As the dog days of September draw near, I can't recommend this book enough for a quick and satisfying read.

**A free copy was provided through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.**

## Shelby \*trains flying monkeys\* says

Kids, if you ever thought about trying drugs grab up this book. You'll run so far away from them that you will leave your butt-hole behind.

Six heroin addicts find themselves unconscious on a deserted island. They start waking up and realize that something ain't right here. They have a box left with a few food items and a note that says that must swim to the next island in order to get that ever elusive next high.

Stone cold addicts that they are..you know they are gonna get to jonesing and head off that way.

Problem number one is...there is something in the water.

They are also informed that they are being watched.

This book reads all kinds of fast, you keep thinking surely the characters won't trade in their lives so easily for that next hit.

But.

*Booksourc*: I did receive a copy of this book from the author, I promised him nothing. He knew I would love the hell out of this sickness. AND I DID!

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## Dan Schwent says

Six heroin addicts wake up on an island in the Florida keys with no idea who they wound up there. The only thing standing between them and a top quality heroin fix on the next island is an expanse of shark-infested water...

When J. Kent Messum hit me up to review an ARC of this, I hesitated at first. Until I read about the sharks and the heroin, that is! Who doesn't like grim death sports? Welcome to the Heroin Games! May the odds be ever in your favor...

Jokes aside, this was pretty bad ass. While the characters weren't super-detailed, who the hell expects them to be? They're chum for a bunch of sharks!

The structure of the story added a lot to the experience, using shifting viewpoints and different points in time to tell the stories of the unwilling contestants before they wound up being shark bait for some sick bastards' amusement.

I felt like I was sitting right alongside the spectators on the boat, wondering who would be devoured next. I was wrong about who the last person standing would be, a nice surprise.

There's some serious gore in Bait. I let out a few audible groans during this, disturbing my dog. The suspense of the shark attacks was masterfully done. The ending was good and, as I said, a nice surprise.

Bait is a chum-spattered good time, a lot of fun in a time when we could all use some. Four out of five stars.

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## **Arah-Lynda says**

*Gerald Francis McCabe, he thought. That's who I was-  
He was struck from every angle and with every measure of force.  
Blood bloomed thick around him. Tick did not resurface.  
Nearby, beer bottles clicked, cigars burned, and significant money exchanged hands.*

Six heroin addicts, strangers to each other, all from the seedy underbelly of Miami, find themselves stranded on a deserted island in the Florida Keys. They are jonesing for a fix and the only foreseeable way to get that is to swim to the next island.

But they are being watched, from a yacht anchored off shore, in open water.

*No one is coming to your aid.  
We have ensured this.*

These are shallow waters, where thought can run deep, but do not think yourself safe. You are fodder.

So get that adrenaline flowing, this one has an unapologetic, relentless pace. Only a hundred yards to go.....**move!**

**3.4 stars.** We should keep an eye on this young man.

Not recommended for the faint of heart.

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## **Nancy says**

### **Posted at Shelf Inflicted**

It's been a lot of years since I missed my bus stop because I was so absorbed in a book.

Now that I take the bus to work every day, I mostly use that time to read, except when I'm playing *Words With Friends* or observing my fellow passengers.

This book was on my radar for a while and I kept putting it off because I was afraid it would be derivative and predictable. Thanks to my Goodreads friends' reviews, I thought I'd take a chance and dive in. I'm so glad I did!

It's the author's fault I missed my stop and had to walk to work in the pouring rain. I wasn't grumpy for long, since I knew the remainder of the book awaited me as soon as I got home.

This is a very disturbing, action-packed tale that explores the effects of drug addiction and withdrawal on people's lives and the motivations of a mysterious group of people who have their own bizarre ideas on how to address the drug problem.

The author cleverly provides a backstory about each of the six addicts, including the events that led to their arrival on the island. They are troubled people and certainly not very likable, but I've always had a soft spot for addicts, and it bothered me a little that they were so desperate to get to that cache of heroin that they would risk becoming shark food.

*"He spoke no more, heart twisting in his chest the same as the others. They were beyond fucked up, emotionally wrecked and chemically imbalanced to the point where they were toxic to the hearts and souls of others they came in contact with. Their personal demons had come to roost with the skeletons in their closets, resulting in a rape that produced a broken bastard love-child in each of them. This love-child, born of heroin and regret, needed constant feeding. Sacrifice was the only thing it would eat."*

Only, the story wasn't so predictable as that. The bad guys and the sharks are not the only danger. There is much infighting among the six addicts, and I found myself trying to predict the order they would be killed and who would survive in the end.

Read this for the action and gore, or read it to see how poor choices and lack of empathy and respect for others wreck human lives. Either way, you won't be disappointed.

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## **PirateSteve says**

Six stolen junkies  
an island their new home.  
One tried to slip away,  
never more to roam.

Five jonesin junkies,  
a swimin in the sea.  
Along comes a tiger shark,  
as hungry as can be.

Four fearful junkies....

The abductors in this story wager with each other as to which junkie may best survive the sharks. It was fun as a reader to play along. My pick made it well over half way but alas... twas still a pick of doom.

"if he ever made it out alive, he would turn his damned life around, ask forgiveness... He'd go to rehab."

"the fin had climbed out of the water again, closer this time and moving toward them with more intent. "Shark!" she screamed."

""What was left?" he asked."

""Looks like an armpit got spit out again...""

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### **Zoeytron says**

Six down and dirty junkies awaken on an island and find they are neck deep in a deadly game of survivor they never intended to play. All are plagued with relentless itching, all of them scratching incessantly. They are fighting severe cramping and extreme nausea. All that stands between them and their next fix is a short swim to an island across the way. All too soon, they find out those particular waters are swimming with sharks. Sharks! Ready yourself for gore galore. The war on drugs is fought here in a frightfully different way.

A signed copy was furnished by the author in exchange for a review. Thank you!

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### **J. Kent Messum says**

It's SHARK WEEK again!

Unbelievably, BAIT has garnered a bit of a cult status over the last few years and appears on a lot of people's must-read lists for Shark Week. I'm honored that my first novel often gets thrown in the ring with this week of fantastic shark programs and documentaries.

Big thanks to everyone who has been recommending it to their friends and fellow readers! Much appreciated!

Cheers,

J. Kent Messum

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### **Kemper says**

*I received a free copy of this book for review from the author.*

Can you imagine waking up on an island with a bunch of good-for-nothing junkies who almost immediately start going into withdrawal and puking all over the place? And your only way out is by swimming through waters infested with hungry sharks?

Still, it sounds more appealing than being on a season of *Survivor*.

So these smack-hounds wake up on a beach in the Florida Keys with no idea how they got there. There's a small amount of food and water left there with a note that they can get more by swimming to the next island,

and the bigger prize is a whole bunch of heroin if they can make it through the sharks. Will they try to swim for it or not?

Uh, I did mention that they are junkies and there's heroin on that next island, right?

There are some stories idea that just sound so amazingly outrageous that you immediately want to check them out. *Sharks vs. Junkies* is one of those. Messum walks a fine line here of setting up an idea that could have been a movie on SyFy channel, adding enough depth of character and tragedy so that it doesn't seem like a total cartoon, and then still delivering enough scenes of sharks devouring junkies that it satisfies the itch you got when you heard the idea. (You sick bastards!)

I'm not sure if this could have been sustained in a longer novel, but at 288 pages it hits the sweet spot of being tight enough to work without feeling rushed. Intercutting flashbacks of each character gives us a snapshot of their lives as addicts, and Messum makes them sympathetic by highlighting wasted potential but he doesn't glamorize or excuse them.

I was a little less sold on the parts that shift to the men behind the whole Turn-Junkies-Into-Fish-Food scheme. There's decent motivation provided, but I think the book may have worked a tad better if we knew nothing about them or why they were doing it until the very end where the final chapter provided an excellent opportunity for a bit of exposition to explain motives. Keeping them more mysterious might have tightened up the book even further and added more tension.

Still, it's an intriguing and well written story that delivers on the concept it's selling. It also reinforced my belief that nothing good happens in the ocean.

Finally, I owe J. Kent Messum some thanks. He had approached me about reviewing his newer book, and I turned him down because I'm just a dick like that. Then Dan told me about this book with sharks chewing on heroin addicts, and I'm only human so I wanted in on that action. I didn't realize that this was by a writer I'd previously refused to review, but once we got that got sorted JKM was very gracious and cool enough to send me this along with his new one *Husk* which I'll read and review soon.

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## **Mandy says**

Bait receives a 4.5 rating from me.

Bait encompasses the lives of 6 heroin junkies that are the worst of the worse. Their heroin habit is bad and I mean horrible. Trading money, sex, and other degrading things for the drugs. This all changes when they wake up on a deserted island with no heroin and a box with water and a note.

The note tells them if they want more drugs they have to swim a mile to get it, to the next island. No problem right?! Spoiler alert... They have to swim with hungry sharks, blood thirsty sharks. Yum.

These six engulf on a harrowing adventure of survival and instincts to help them live.

Meanwhile an ex military man and his pals watch the horror unfold. Why are they doing this and what is their motive? Why watch people swim to safety while sharks prey upon them?

Bait is a highly addictive thriller that captivates you from the first page and leaving you with wanting more at the end. Great book! Highly recommend!!

## ??? 2.? says

Dear Mr. Trump,

I know you're always on the lookout for creative new ways to tackle age-old issues, and you've shown you clearly aren't afraid of ruffling some feathers or resorting to extreme measures. Therefore, in my view, it's *high time* we adopt a radical new approach in our fight against the drug crisis currently plaguing America. Might I suggest, for your consideration . . . Bait.

*Six heroin addicts are in for the ultimate rude awakening, when they come to dazed and confused and somehow marooned on a deserted island in the Florida Keys. After much bickering and finger pointing, they eventually calm down enough to discuss this troubling state of affairs and attempt to puzzle out the circumstances which led them here.*

*Searching the island they discover a trunk on the beach. Inside are few sandwiches and a note informing them that there will be no rescue—"much effort has been made to ensure this." Thus, you have the following options—stay here, starve to death and suffer through the debilitating effects of withdraw, or swim to the next island a mile away where more food will be provided, along with a taste of the highest-quality heroin money can buy, plus a chance at possible escape. Please note, "You are being observed at all times."*

*Seems like a no-brainer, even for a few hopheads. However, there's one minor sticky point -between them and the next island, lies an ocean full of monsters with razor-sharp teeth!*

*So it goes. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Oh and, good luck swimming with that 800-pound gorilla on your back.*

This book was a lot of fun—a short little action-packed tale that packed quite a wallop. Initially, it took me some time to get into the story. The first half was filled with flashbacks, which help to flesh out all the players. Kudos to the author, for providing just enough details for me to develop a vested interest in lives of a few junkies. Once the stage was set, that second half ratcheted up the intensity.

I know a few of my friends were worried that a Debbie Downer like myself would be unable to see past what, on the surface at least, appeared to be a *ridiculous*<sup>TM</sup> setup enough to enjoy this story. But have no fear, I actually found the tormentors' logic to be sound and their actions plausible. After their reasoning was laid bare, the story became more than just swimming a fool's gauntlet into somewhat of a social commentary on the war on drugs.

**Bottom line:** If you're looking for a quick little adventure and aren't afraid of some gore, this book should provide a nice diversion from the day to day drudgery. However, if you're unlucky enough to count a hard-core drug addict among your circle of friends or family, you may want to pray that our glorious leader never gets his grubby little paws on this book - lest he get any brilliant ideas.

Many thanks to the author for providing me a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review. Sorry it took me so long to get around to reading it.

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## karen says

will there be more sharks tonight? probably - it's SSSHHHHAAARRRKKK WEEEEEEKKKKKKK

the best book pitting sharks against junkies of 2013!!

or ever.

when i first heard about this book, i was in the middle of making this weekly bn mystery email thing that i do for work, and i immediately knew i had to feature this title and i also knew i would have to read it. because - come on! so i made a whole NOOK channel around this book called "the killing games" (while, naturally, this was running through my head) and if you can think of any other books that are like this; either things like *battle royale* where there is an organized fight-to-the-death scenario, or something smaller-scale, where someone kills using very involved and controlled game-like set-ups (like the movie *saw*), give me a holler, i would both like to expand that channel and read some of them myself.

but *bait*.

i read this in a day. this is a book that is simple pure adrenaline fun, not a stick to your ribs kind of book. but it has a hell of a premise, and this puppy zooms.

six people wake up on a deserted beach of a remote island in the florida keys with no knowledge of how they got there. they have never met before, and despite their different races, ages, genders, and sexual lifestyles, they all have one thing in common: they are all serious heroin addicts who have demonstrated that they will do anything for a fix.

and here's their chance to extend the boundaries of "anything."

because also on that beach is a box with some food and water, and a letter instructing them that the only way off the island is to somehow get to a the next island, where another box will be waiting for them, with more food and water, and also - a lot of heroin. and also that their progress will be monitored.

they see a boat floating in the water with men on deck watching them, and despite their starting to feel the torments of withdrawal, they have no choice but to try to make the swim.

but the people on the boat aren't going to make it easy for them; this is not the first time they have played this game, and they have a bunch of sharks at the ready, with a taste for human blood.

oh, this is a most dangerous game, indeed!

the structure of the book is a chapter of beach-story leading into a chapter from the pre-beach backstory of one of the six junkies or their kidnapers. each chapter ends with a sentence that mirrors the first sentence of the subsequent chapter in a fun-gimmicky blurred-boundaries way, so we do get character development, and readerly sympathies, but it is best not to get too attached. this is very much a "six junkies enter, one junkie

leaves" scenario.

so, gentlemen, take your bets.

come to my blog!

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## **Delee says**

I don't normally go out of my way to acquire very many paper copies of a book- but this time I felt it was very important. First I pestered selfish Dan 2.0 to give me his copy...and when he wouldn't budge I went all the way to the tippity top- and semi-stalked the author himself. And low and behold- he decided it was in his best interest to provide me a copy rather than have me hound him for the rest of his days...I will leave you be now...but I have to say this is an author to watch- I wouldn't have gone to this trouble if I didn't think he was worth stalking. He also provided me a copy of Husk ...which I will also be floating my review for along with this one...Thanks J!!!

BAIT is one of those novels I probably would have never come across if I hadn't joined Goodreads. It is a tad more gruesome and twisted than I would have dared to read a couple of years ago...So I would first like to say "THANKS GOODREADS"!! This was disturbingly fun. What that says about me...I don't know.

So we have a beautiful secluded Island. Looks pretty doesn't it? But what if you add this.

Still not scary? How about a few more hanging about?

Let's add a group of crazy dudes who take the game of survivor up a notch.

...and then of course the unwilling participants. Some heroin addicts.

Now we have ourselves one sick little book.

Six people wake up on a deserted island in the Florida Keys with no memory of how they got there. After a

bit of chit chat and some keen observation they realize what they have in common. They are alllll heroin addicts. As withdrawal starts to set in- the group notice a yacht anchored somewhat close by. On it four individuals who are definitely NOT coming to their rescue. As the castaways explore a little further they find a box with some "supplies" and a note...

*Dear civilians,*

*Please know that no one will be coming to your aid. Much effort has been made to ensure this. Enjoy what has been provided, but also know that it is all the sustenance you shall receive here. Food and water will only get you so far, as there is something else you desire, and will continue to more and more as time passes. If you want the next hit, you will have to earn it. Your target is the island across the channel to the north, where another box of supplies awaits. This one also contains an allotment of the purest highest-quality heroin you will ever experience, guaranteed. Further instructions are in the next box, begin whenever you wish. You are being observed at all times.*

BAIT was a little Jaws (one of my favorite movies!) a little Trainspotting and a little Surviving the Game- So if you don't mind a little gore, and the twisted scenario...you might want to dive into this quick-paced little gem.

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