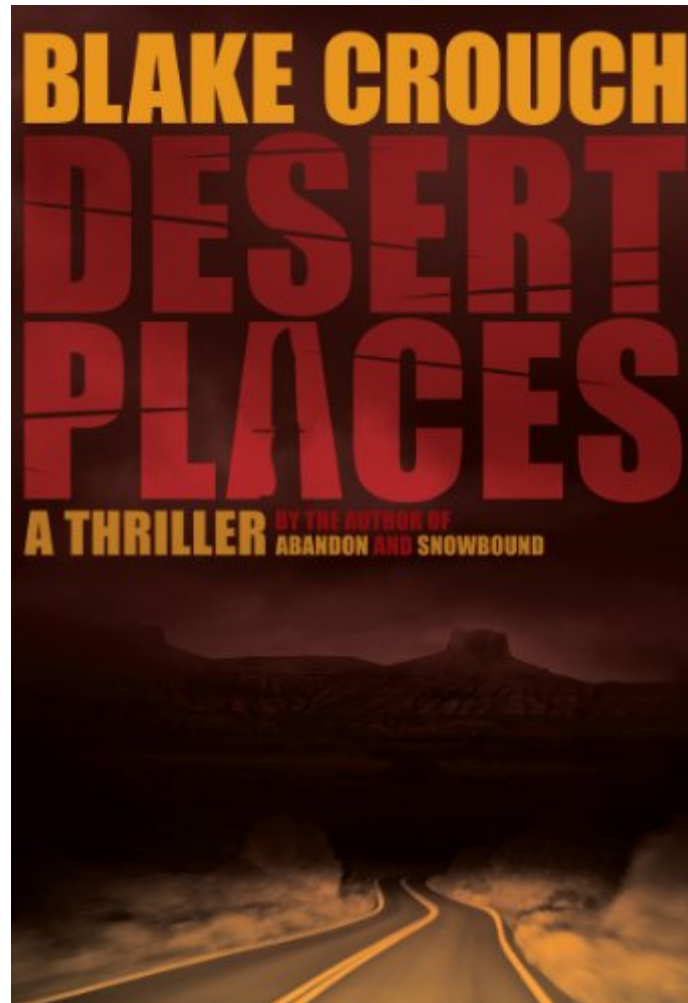


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Desert Places (Andrew Z. Thomas/Luther Kite Series Book 1)



Synopsis

The first installment in the Andrew Z. Thomas Series and a prequel to Crouch's and Konrath's thriller *STIRRED...Greetings*. There is a body buried on your property, covered in your blood. The unfortunate young lady's name is Rita Jones. In her jeans pocket you'll find a slip of paper with a phone number on it. Call that number. If I have not heard from you by 8:00 P.M., the police will receive an anonymous call. I'll tell them where Rita Jones is buried on your property, how you killed her, and where the murder weapon can be found in your house. (I do believe a paring knife is missing from your kitchen.) I strongly advise against going to the police, as I am always watching you.

Andrew Z. Thomas is a successful writer of suspense thrillers, living the dream at his lake house in the piedmont of North Carolina. One afternoon in late spring, he receives a bizarre letter that eventually threatens his career, his sanity, and the lives of everyone he loves. A murderer is designing his future, and for the life of him, Andrew can't get away.

Dear Reader: Please keep the light on tonight. What happens next will scare you. Guaranteed.

This 70,000-word eBook also contains a Foreword by Jack Kilborn, a bonus interview with Blake, excerpts from his other novels, and excerpts from two new horror novels, *ENDURANCE* and *TRAPPED*, by J.A. Konrath.

About the Author: BLAKE CROUCH was born near the piedmont town of Statesville, North Carolina in 1978. He attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and graduated in 2000 with degrees in English and Creative Writing. Blake is the author of four novels and numerous short stories. He lives with his family in southwest Colorado, where he is at work on a new book.

PRAISE FOR DESERT PLACES...Harrowing...terrific...a whacked out combination of Stephen King and Cormac McCarthy.

PAT CONROY Crouch's smart, tight prose displays plenty of narrative energy...[he] shows real talent here...

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY An ingenious, diabolical debut that calls into question all our easy moral assumptions. *DESERT PLACES* is a genuine thriller that pulses with adrenaline from start to finish. Blake Crouch is one of the most exciting new writers I've read in years.

VAL MCDERMID *DESERT PLACES* is about survival, both emotional and physical. Crouch delivers his description of place with telling and vivid prose...[and his] carefully crafted characters make the story immediate, intense and thoroughly believable...will linger in the [reader's] consciousness long after the book is read.

DENVER POST [T]he fastest, meanest read I've had in quite a while. Crouch clamps on and propels you forward, even though you're not at all sure you want to go into the disturbing places where he's taking you.

THE CAPITAL TIMES Wow. Sometimes you stumble across a book that just plain creeps you out. There are many types of *DESERT PLACES*, and the most inhospitable are in the human heart.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS [T]wisted...surprises around every turn...don't climb in if you have a heart condition, high blood pressure, might be pregnant, or are

under four feet tall.IREDELL CITIZENCrouch maintains a roller-coaster pace, with twists that leave you blinking.THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER[Crouch's] writing is sick, and I mean that in the very best way. If DESERT PLACES is any indication of what we can expect from Crouch in the future, be prepared to see his name on the bestseller lists.OTTAWA SUNThis is a complex, cleverly constructed novel of motive, and Crouch takes his time bringing us through the story...it's a great debut. Crouch is an author to watch.THE GLOBE AND MAIL (TORONTO)Blake Crouch is a major league talent who's going to be really, really big.SARAH WEINMAN, Gumshoe-Award Winning Crime Columnist

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Customer Reviews

I have to admit that I saw this book jacket and it alone scared me, so after reading the reviews here I decided to spend the money on the hardcover and try it. I was some of the best money that I ever spent. I was blown away by the stoyline and really began to feel for Andy. His characters were believable, scary as that may be, and the plot was think with suspense. I found myself reading huge chunks of the book at a time and it was a very fast read. Was it gory - yes - is it for everyone - no -

BUT this is a well written book that has the potential to capture a huge following of fan waiting for the sequel. This book did not contain anything new in terms of violence or blood. The violence was second to a plot that was explosive. Give it a try - I think you will be a fan of this debut as well.

Robert Frost's poem provides a title and an epigram to this engrossing first novel, the pulse pounding tale of an outwardly civilized man forced into acting in an uncivilized (to say the least) manner. That man is Andrew Thomas, best selling author of suspense novels with titles like *Blue Murder* and *The Scorcher*. Thomas lives the good life until the day he receives a letter in the mail, telling him that a woman's body has been buried on his property, a body soaked in the author's blood. Confirming this sad fact, Thomas is forced to play his tormentor's twisted game, one which requires him to make a journey to Wyoming, where he ultimately must confront his own mortality, and question his morality and sanity. Thomas confronts a question most never have to face: just how far is he willing to go to survive? The answer is as disturbing to him as it will be to readers. *Desert Places* is one of those books that you don't discuss in detail with those you recommend it to for fear of diminishing the impact the book will have on them. It's also the kind of book which induces those who have already read it to stand over the shoulder of current readers, asking, "Did you get to the part where..." Because of that, it is almost criminal to reveal further plot points. Suffice it to say that Crouch successfully manipulates plot elements previously explored in such classic thrillers as James Dickey's *Deliverance* and David Morrell's *Long Lost*, producing a novel whose intensity is sometimes almost too hard to take. Fast paced, surprising, at turns tragic and graphic, *Desert Places* will take readers to places that, given a choice, they'd probably avoid. Finding themselves in those places via Crouch's surprisingly accomplished prose, however, they can't help but linger a bit, looking over the grim landscape in morbid fascination.

I hated it, but I couldn't quit reading it! This book was one of the scariest things I've read since *Kiss the Girls*. I can't wait to get it out of my house so I don't have to look at the creepy guy on the cover anymore. It's a book you're even afraid to put next to your bedside table. It has a life of its own. Darn scary book. If you like terror and fright, this is the book for you!

I read and greatly enjoyed the author's book "Run," so I decided to give this one a try. Oh boy was that a mistake. Books with that rare combination of unlikeable characters and nauseating events are thankfully few and far between. The supposed 'hero' guy was an annoying idiot, who seemed to do everything wrong and counter to what a normal person would do. The bad guy was such a

monumental ass that, when I was a quarter of the way into the book, I was despairing at the thought of having to read about this guy for 3 times more pages. You know a book's in trouble if you're praying the antagonist will get killed shortly after being introduced to him. I've read my share of books with nasty, irredeemable villains, but they were used as antagonists to likeable heroes, and the fun was seeing how the heroes could overcome the villain. In this book I really wish a meteor would've fallen out of the sky and killed both of them. The only remotely sympathetic characters meet horrible ends early on, and the poor reader is left with no one but these two vile characters to read about for half the book. Unless you're really into lots and lots of graphic torture and you don't care about interesting (or at least sympathetic) characters, give this a pass.

Blake Crouch, *Desert Places* (St. Martin's, 2003) Is it me, or does the name "Blake Crouch" just scream nom de plume to you? One almost wonders if Mr. Crouch hasn't cooked up a little semi-autobiographical tale here. But that aside...*Desert Places*, Blake Crouch's debut novel, shows us an author with a great grasp of character, pacing, and plot, and perhaps not enough of an editing team. The novel roars to a start when successful thriller novelist Andrew Thomas gets an anonymous piece of mail telling him a body's buried on his property, his blood is on the victim, his fingerprints are on the murder weapon, and he has twenty-four hours to verify all this and call the real killer. This done, said real killer leads him into a rather ingenious trap, from which Mr. Thomas must escape in the most interesting of ways. And so far, so good. We've covered about half the novel. There's also another really strong section at the end. But, just like *Saving Private Ryan*, you get stuck with this middle portion that drags. It's the shortest part of the novel, but it's also the most interminable. To Crouch's credit, he does wait for long, tedious setup until after the reader is already hooked, but it's still there, and could probably have been compressed into fewer pages than it actually took. That said, the stronger parts of this novel are well worth reading, and they go by extremely quickly. That it dips in quality halfway through can be gotten past, if you're expecting it. Definitely one to check out, and an author to keep an eye on. *** ã Æ

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