



Beasts of No Nation: A Novel (P.S.)

By Uzodinma Iweala

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Beasts of No Nation: A Novel (P.S.) By Uzodinma Iweala

The harrowing, utterly original debut novel by Uzodinma Iweala about the life of a child soldier in a war-torn African country—now a critically-acclaimed Netflix original film directed by Cary Fukunaga (*True Detective*) and starring Idris Elba (*Mandela, The Wire*).

As civil war rages in an unnamed West-African nation, Agu, the school-aged protagonist of this stunning debut novel, is recruited into a unit of guerilla fighters. Haunted by his father's own death at the hands of militants, which he fled just before witnessing, Agu is vulnerable to the dangerous yet paternal nature of his new commander.

While the war rages on, Agu becomes increasingly divorced from the life he had known before the conflict started—a life of school friends, church services, and time with his family, still intact. As he vividly recalls these sunnier times, his daily reality continues to spin further downward into inexplicable brutality, primal fear, and loss of selfhood. In a powerful, strikingly original voice, Uzodinma Iweala leads the reader through the random travels, betrayals, and violence that mark Agu's new community. Electrifying and engrossing, *Beasts of No Nation* announces the arrival of an extraordinary new writer.

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Beasts of No Nation: A Novel (P.S.) By Uzodinma Iweala Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Iweala's visceral debut is unrelenting in its brutality and unremitting in its intensity. Agu, the precocious, gentle son of a village schoolteacher father and a Bible-reading mother, is dragooned into an unnamed West African nation's mad civil war—a slip of a boy forced, almost overnight, to shoulder a soldier's bloody burden. The preteen protagonist is molded into a fighting man by his demented guerrilla leader and, after witnessing his father's savage slaying, by an inchoate need to belong to some kind of family, no matter how depraved. He becomes a killer, gripped by a muddled sense of revenge as he butchers a mother and daughter when his ragtag unit raids a defenseless village; starved for both food and affection, he is sodomized by his commandant and rewarded with extra food scraps and a dry place to sleep. The subject of the 23-year-old novelist's story—Iweala is American born of Nigerian descent—is gripping enough. But even more stunning is the extraordinarily original voice with which this tale is told. The impressionistic narration by a boy constantly struggling to understand the incomprehensible is always breathless, often breathtaking and sometimes heartbreaking. Its odd singsong cadence and twisted use of tense take a few pages to get used to, but Iweala's electrifying prose soon enough propels a harrowing read. (Nov. 8)

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From [The New Yorker](#)

This startling début by a young American-Nigerian writer follows the fortunes of Agu, a child soldier fighting in the civil war of an unnamed African country. Iweala's acute imagining of Agu's perspective allows him to depict the war as a mesh of bestial pleasures and pain. As seen through Agu's eyes, machetes sound like music, and bodies come apart on roads so cracked that you can see "the red mud bleeding from underneath." Agu has a child's primitive drive that enables him to survive his descent into hell, and, despite the brutality he witnesses and participates in, to keep hold of something resembling optimism. The contrast between his belief in the future and the horrific descriptions of the world around him makes Agu a haunting narrator.

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Iweala, 23, a first-time novelist, does not know violence firsthand. But as an undergraduate at Harvard, he traveled to Nigeria, conducted research, and turned his senior thesis (directed by Jamaica Kincaid) into a novel. The topic couldn't be timelier: an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 child soldiers currently fight in armed conflicts around the world. Written in an appropriately choppy, raw present-tense that captures Agu's visceral, gut-wrenching emotions as he kills innocent women and children, *Beasts* introduces a powerful new voice in fiction. It's not an easy one to swallow, however. But despite Agu's transformation, critics remained astonishingly sympathetic to him until the end. Though circumstances may shape people forever, "Iweala seems to tell us in this potent work, no one—especially a child—is ever totally beyond hope" (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

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