

## **Soil**

Jamie Kornegay

A renegade farmer who goes up against nature and loses forms the basis of independent Southern bookseller Kornegay's memorable first novel. When Jay Mize gave up the comforts of a respectable career and home to begin an experiment in soil-free farming, he expected to be on the cutting edge of an agricultural revolution. But a crippling flood washes out his efforts and places him on the road to bankruptcy, and his wife, Sandy, concerned about Jay's mental health, leaves with their son. Soon after, Jay comes upon a corpse in the Tockawah River behind his house; convinced the body is part of a plot to destroy him, he sets about making it disappear. Meanwhile, a nosy deputy with a roving eye for the town's single women is poking around the Mize farm (not to mention Sandy's apartment) in search of a big bust to validate his wayward career. Add to that a revenge-seeking vagrant roaming the woods behind Jay's property and perhaps his paranoia isn't so misguided after all. **VERDICT** Kornegay imbues his characters with depth and his story with suspense, but the real star of the book is the pungent and foreboding Mississippi earth itself. A promising debut from an assured new voice in Southern fiction.

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