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Red Hen Press

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Trash Mountain

A NOVEL BY
Bradley Bazzle

In a scummy southern town where the only thriving business is trash, a quirky teenager with a terroristic spark must decide whether to destroy the noxious landfill next to his house or do what everybody else does: work there.

Ben Shippers doesn't have much use for school, friends, or any members of his family except his smartass sister, but he has a secret passion: Trash Mountain, the central feature of the noxious landfill next to his house. After a botched attempt to destroy Trash Mountain with a homemade firebomb, Ben begins a years-long infiltration that finds him dropping out of school to work alongside homeless trash-pickers, and then, finally, interning at the very place he meant to destroy. Ben's boss there, a charismatic would-be titan of sanitation, forces Ben to choose between providing for his family and sticking to his terroristic principals.

With dark humor, *Trash Mountain* reflects on life in small southern cities in decline, and on the search for meaning among young people without adult examples.

ADVANCE PRAISE

"Imagine Holden Caulfield growing up in a small Southern city, in the shadow of a toxic Everest—that's the small miracle Bradley Bazzle conjures in *Trash Mountain*. It's a debut novel of the most astonishing sort, one that appears to have sprung fully formed from the capacious mind of its creator. Ben Shippers is a hero of humble means and epic proportions, a young man torn between the outsized idealism of childhood and the cruel compromises of adulthood. The story he tells us is sad, funny, beautiful, and thrilling. I read the thing in one long, greedy gulp, and did so with my heart ablaze."

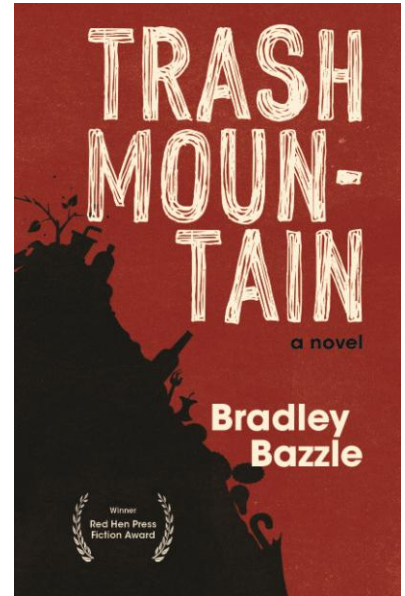
—**Steve Almond**, author of *Candyfreak* and *Bad Stories* and co-host of the *New York Times* podcast "Dear Sugars" with Cheryl Strayed

"Bradley Bazzle is as funny as any novelist writing today. In this vivid coming-of-age romp about a noble arsonist, small-town grifters, and high school satanists, Bazzle picks through the rubble of our rotting civilization to reveal eternal truths about honor and shame. *Trash Mountain* is a mournful, bonkers portrait of a society made of trash."

—**Nathaniel Rich**, author of *King Zenó* and *Odds Against Tomorrow*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bradley Bazzle is the winner of the Red Hen Press Fiction Award for his forthcoming novel, *Trash Mountain*. His short stories have won awards from *The Iowa Review*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Third Coast*. He grew up in Dallas, Texas, and earned his degrees from Yale University, Indiana University, and the University of Georgia, where he taught writing. He remains in Athens, Georgia, with his wife and daughter.



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MORE PRAISE FOR BRADLEY BAZZLE

“From Mark Twain to George Saunders, Bradley Bazzle’s *Trash Mountain* joins a long tradition of dark humor, wild inventiveness, and social satire in American letters. By turns hilarious, colorful, and strange, this affecting debut novel revels in the absurd but never strays far from the deeply felt humanity of its characters.”

—**Maceo Montoya**, author of *The Deportation of Wopper Barraza*

“In *Trash Mountain*, Bradley Bazzle has created a perfect protagonist in Ben Shippers: peculiar yet endearing, curiouser than a cat, and ready to take on the (trashy) challenges his young life throws at him. The novel is funny and engaging, and Bradley’s concise and vivid prose guides us masterfully to its insightful conclusion. What a fine debut!”

—**Samrat Upadhyay**, author of *Arresting God in Kathmandu*

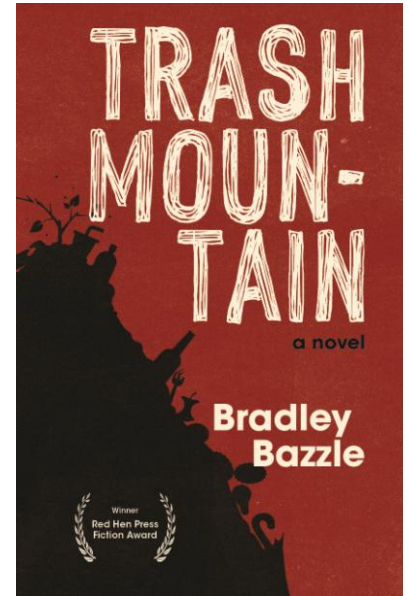
FROM TRASH MOUNTAIN

Trash Mountain loomed outside Ruthanne’s bedroom window, on the other side of a fence. Trash Mountain was so unstable that the fence was lined with razor wire so kids wouldn’t climb around on it. Trash Mountain didn’t smell like trash, weirdly, but like this spray they sprayed on it that smelled like bowling shoe spray, times a million. Trash Mountain was always changing: a flattened fridge on top one day, pieces of car the next, couch cushions, a dried-up houseplant. Trash Mountain grew and grew until it was literally a mountain, meaning taller than one thousand feet. Ruthanne and I could tell how tall it was because we approached the issue scientifically. What we did was put our eyes in the exact same spot, at the bottom left corner of Ruthanne’s bed, and use an old key to scratch a mark on Ruthanne’s window where the top of Trash Mountain was. Then we measured Trash Mountain with a special technique I learned at school to measure trees, using the tree’s shadow and a pencil. It was trigonometry, basically. I was a genius at it. Maybe I could have done it for a living, but instead I had to destroy Trash Mountain.

One day Carl who drove us to school was hanging around our house while he waited for my parents, who hadn’t paid him, and he saw me marking the window with the key. Ruthanne was in the bathroom, maybe hiding. Carl asked what I was doing and I told him. He laughed, which pissed me off, but then he got serious. He said, “Yeah, man, it’s fucked up y’all live right next to that thing. Could be worse, though. On the other side, in Haislip, they don’t even spray it down. But those Haislip people don’t complain.”

“Pretty soon they won’t have to complain,” I said, and I laid out for Carl a plan that had been germinating inside me. My plan was to tunnel into the base of Trash Mountain and plant a nuclear bomb inside it, then escape just in time to roll under the porch while the bomb went off and incinerated the whole dump.

Carl nodded. He knew a good plan when he heard it.



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