



Reprobate: A Katla Novel

Martyn V. Halm

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Assassin Katla breaks her own rules when confronted with an unusual witness...

Blessed with an almost non-existent conscience, freelance assassin and corporate troubleshooter Katla Sieltjes, expert in disguising homicide, regards murder for profit as an intricate and rewarding occupation. Her solitary existence seems more than satisfactory until a blind musician wanders in on her crime scene. Katla only kills for profit or to protect her anonymity, and Bram Merleyn seems harmless and unable to identify her. By sparing his life, she breaks one of her most important rules—never leave a living witness. A decision Katla might not survive to regret...

***Reprobate* is the first novel in the Amsterdam Assassin Series.**

With authentic details and brisk action against the backdrop of the notorious Dutch capital, featuring a devious heroine and a supporting cast of singular characters, *Reprobate* gives a rare glimpse into local Dutch culture, the narcotics trade, computer hacking, motorcycle gangs, mehndi bridal tattoos, martial arts, the psychology of social engineering, and the brutal efficacy of disciplined violence.

This e-book features a glossary.

Reprobate: A Katla Novel Details

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From Reader Review Reprobate: A Katla Novel for online ebook

RyooT says

The term Reprobate is used synonymously with scoundrel or villain, but it is defined as 'an unprincipled person'. Katla Sieltjes might be unscrupulous by general standards, but according to her own moral compass she couldn't be more principled. She doesn't maim, she doesn't torture, she kills whomever she is paid for killing and she only kills bystanders if they could identify her, to name just a few. That's why she lets Bram Merleyn live when the blind man inadvertently invades her job site, a gallery whose owner she's just killed with one of his own swords.

What makes Katla so intriguing is that she is thoroughly human. She's a consummate professional assassin or 'corporate problem solver', but sometimes she makes mistakes, too. The story line is believable and whatever Katla does is as surprising and inventive as it is realistic. In counterpoint to the fast-paced action stands her slow, almost sensual pursuit of the blind man. She is drawn to him by his looks and demeanor and she methodically stalks him, getting closer and closer until he turns the tables on her and reveals that he recognizes her from the gallery. What results is the slowly evolving romance of two people who are without prejudice about each other.

While the main story line around the contract killings was a little predictable and I guessed the villain early-on in the story, what pulled me along most was my desire to get to the next chapter in the evolution of Katla and Bram. Several times I had to restrain myself from jumping ahead to get straight to their next interaction. Details about both of them are revealed slowly, sometimes expected, more often surprising, but never clichéd. In between the story unfolds with interesting secondary characters and you can't help rooting for Katla when she is double-crossed. And while some readers might feel righteous elation and schadenfreude at Katla's successful pursuit of the double-crosser, Katla herself sees nothing but clinical necessity to protect herself.

By the end of the story I was thoroughly enthralled and I can't wait to get my hands on the second novel Peccadillo to find out who and how Katla will be killing next and how her relationship with Bram will continue to evolve.

Tom says

The first thing that must be said about Reprobate: A Katla Novel is that the attention to detail is incredible. Every moment of the book serves to show the author's unique knowledge of his subject material, from the weapons used by Katla to the street-by-street routes taken through Amsterdam. While there are many unfamiliar words describing Japanese blades and culture, motorcycle parts, and locations in Amsterdam, I felt all of these were fitting inclusions that helped set the tone and credibility of the story.

Katla Sieltjes is an assassin operating out of Amsterdam who is skilled in so many disciplines that she can carry out virtually any assignment (under any assumed cover) with enough planning. She can stage deaths to look like cartel hits, complete accidents, or make a person disappear entirely. With her unique skillset and dynamic personality, I equated her to a kind of James Bond spy character, except she works on the other side of the law. The multiple assassinations plot is interesting and easy enough to follow, though there are a lot of pages to get through to reach closure.

The story was honestly a long read, and it would be nigh impossible to work through in a single sitting. As mentioned before, there is a lot of detail in the book, and at some points it becomes a little overwhelming. When the minutiae was deployed in full force and the action lagged, I had to force myself to keep reading lest I put the book down and not return for hours or days. I wouldn't mind having a fast-forward button at certain points, such as when driving sequences are described turn for turn; it did little to advance the plot, except to show off Amsterdam and portray Katla's inherent aversion to being tailed by somebody back to her house. There are no info dumps, thankfully, but the entire book works as one dense collection of details that must be waded through to grasp the core story of murder and intrigue.

Let's talk for a moment about the characters. I love Kourou, Zeph, Katla, and Bram, in that order. They feel like real people (and a macaw) that I might meet on the street and invite out for lunch.

Katla has an interesting background: she chooses to be a killer not because of a twisted childhood, but simply because she is good at it. She manages to lead a fairly normal life when she is not on the job, and the lucrative nature of her work means we don't have to follow her working in an office to earn a living while keeping her secret identity.

Bram is a blind jazz enthusiast who also leads his own mostly-independent life, and out of the several points of view given in the book, his might be my favorite. Ironic, I know, given the blindness, but his "view" is rich, deep, and believable, giving a tactile sense to things we'd ordinarily see and dismiss.

But do I love the idea of these two main characters being together? I'm not convinced. Some of the scenes seem contrived simply to show one aspect or another of each character, with little connection to the actual story; when they occurred, I immediately felt they were out of place. The relationship between Bram and Katla happens a little too quickly, too, and the circumstances of their first few meetings still make me wonder. There are also some illicit sex scenes that would be off-limits for some readers, and again, I felt the sexual side of their relationship happened very abruptly in comparison with the slow emotional and intellectual build-up.

As I said earlier, there are multiple points of view in this story. One such POV is the joint task force assembled to break up a local drug ring, which inevitably puts them on Katla's trail when an operation goes awry. We see this perspective through the eyes of Deborah Stern, a DEA agent from America. Ordinarily, I would love hearing both sides of the investigation and watching with growing anticipation as the agents of the law move in on the killer, but that doesn't happen here. Deborah is given a little backstory that isn't relevant to the plot, and the group as a whole gets few descriptors besides one-line adjectives. At times, I could hear two characters speaking with the same voice and forgot a third one entirely. In fact, I can't understand why any of these characters mattered in this book, except for the build-up into a series that requires their introduction at some point. I felt that their presence and dialogue was redundant throughout the story, serving mostly to explain once again the details of scenes we've already seen through Katla's perspective. A lot of this perspective's scenes and characters fell flat, severely lacking the depth given to those on Katla's side of the story.

In terms of punctuation, grammar, and formatting, this book is nearly perfect. If there are errors, they are so small and negligible that they don't interrupt the flow of the story.

Overall, I enjoyed the *plot*. The murders are interesting, the details are pristine, and I can imagine everything going on in this world as the characters experience it. I disliked the entire "lawful" side of the book, feeling it was unnecessary for understanding 99% of what was going on, and some characters lacked the verisimilitude achieved in other parts of the book. I would be interested in checking out the sequel, but because of the

density of its detail and almost plodding pace at times, I would be hard-pressed to find the determination to read through this first installment again.

3.5/5 stars.

Eric_W says

My appetite for Halm's Assassin series was whetted by reading his novellas.

Halm skillfully merges several story lines together in this entertaining novel. Unlike his short works,, here he has added several interesting characters: Deborah Stern, a DEA agent coming off a shooting who has been transferred to Amsterdam especially because she speaks fluent Dutch; Bram Merelyn is a blind man whom Katla is watching as he happened upon her in the gallery of a man Katla had just killed. They develop a relationship and there is a great scene where he, the blind man, takes her to a movie.

Katla is hired by some drug dealers to kill an undercover DEA agent who has wormed his way into their midst. They happen to have a source within the police agency so they dare not kill him themselves and must have the killing look like it was done by a member from a competing gang.

Books about assassins rarely work well if the character is just a superhuman killing automaton. Even Stark's Parker has a human side in his relationship with his girlfriend and Keller evolves into a father and regular citizen as Block's series evolves. So Halm has begun to develop Katla, a professional in a bizarre profession. She nevertheless makes mistakes and has an emotional side. She has her own moral compass. Halm's world is populated by very grey moral compasses. As he says, "In this world there is always room for smart immoral people."

I will certainly read the rest of the series, and I'm hoping that the author focuses more on Katla, perhaps developing the relationship with Bram, both interesting characters. A minor gripe is that there were a couple of tidbits I thought to be extraneous. For example the mugging of Deborah Stern, her disabling of the criminal, and then the comments regarding the Dutch legal system 's apparent "coddling" of criminals. If the story was intended to be a critique of their system, it was completely defanged by the subsequent prank played on Stern by her colleagues. I'd love to hear a comment from the author regarding my observation on this.

It's always fun to read novels set in foreign cities. For those interested in more Amsterdam stories, besides Halm's, I can recommend Baantjer's Dekok series. Dekok is a sort of Dutch Maigret.

Ed Morawski says

Reprobate by Martyn V Halm is a great read with interesting fresh characters. As an American who has unfortunately limited experience with Europe (I only managed to get as far as England and Paris a few times), I found the Amsterdam locale refreshing. The author's descriptions and attention to detail quickly made me a fan.

The story is out of the ordinary, combining a mild thriller with a motley crew of well fleshed out characters :

A femme fatale assassin, a blind jazz musician, some intriguing DEA agents who are forced to spend as much time battling politics as drug dealers, and a colorful array of bit players make the novel richly satisfying. I could easily see this as a basis for a great film as it isn't too complicated and doesn't try to be too much- it's just right.

The novel reads very well and doesn't drag at any point, it was only marred by strange twists of grammar attributable to the author's unfamiliarity with the English language I suspect. Overlooking those minor points I enjoyed the details and respected the amount of research the author put into it.

Despite my dislike of 'book series', since this story was closed ended and the characters attractive enough to want to know more, I will certainly check out Martyn's other works.

Olivia Fox says

The concept is very interesting and compelling but I had a few issues.

Bram and Katla's relationships was my favorite thing of the book. It was done naturally (though Bram's acceptance of her profession is quick). And it was sweet, how she becomes attached to him and how he loves her despite her work. I fell in love with Bram from the beginning, he was thoughtful and affectionate. Katla surprised me. I thought she would be colder and more calculating; but I found her open and friendly. Katla's pet was hilarious; a skating bird is a definitely original idea.

There are a lot of POVs, too many in my opinion. I was a little lost with the Dutch and Japanese words and the details about guns all of which I still don't understand.

I don't really see the importance of Deborah's POV because there's not much character development and by the summary at the start I thought she was going to be co-protagonist with Katla. That's why I was disappointed as I had great expectations.

Well, as a whole, I liked the book and I'm thinking about buying the following book.

Roberta Pearce says

This novel caught my attention as its blurb made me think of Larsson's Salander, and as I miss Lisbeth, I was looking for her fill-in. Is Katla Lisbeth? No. Is she an intelligent, resourceful, rather sociopathic misfit? Uh huh. Loved her.

Katla is a freelance assassin whose career choice comes from moral ambiguity in her character. She spends no time in tedious self-examination. She has thought through her philosophies and occasionally gives voice to them - and her reasoning - but there is zero angst. Is she an emotionless automaton? Not even a little bit. She's smart. She's practical. She makes mistakes. But when she does, they are usually subtle, and the author doesn't insult you by holding your hand through them. Did you notice her errors? Maybe; maybe not. They'll be revealed when the time is right - not before, and not after.

Okay, must backtrack a little. I started the novel and promptly ran into a glossary. Now, I'm on the fence about the glossary - lots of words I already knew and it delayed my immediate dive into the book. Could I have looked up everything on Google? *Yep*. Was I glad I didn't have to take time out from reading this novel to do so? *You betcha*.

The point being - don't get in a twist about it. Read the glossary. Don't read the glossary. Just . . . don't let it stop you from reading the book. **[Edit: I have just learned that I had an older edition in my possession, and the novel has since been updated; the glossary has been moved to the back in the current version.]** [Formal style note: In the narrative, there was some lack of commas where I would normally put / expect to see them, but I'm convinced Mr. Halm omitted them deliberately to keep me from taking the slightest breath!]

So, the story. Tiny setup. Action. Kill. Tension. Katla breaks a professional rule by not killing a witness - the exquisitely written Bram - who is blind. More setup. Action! Kill, kill, kill, kill! Exciting stuff - tension for sure, but lazy tension, because you believe Katla's going to come out okay. [Much of the tension throughout comes from knowing Katla is capable of anything. Whether she follows through or not, never matters. It's that "everybody's going to die" feeling that sweeps you up and carries you along.] Then:

(view spoiler) [For those who peek, this might not seem like much of a spoiler, but trust me . . .]

My heart was in my throat. I swear!

All hell breaks loose.

[These are good times.]

The entire sequence is handled so adroitly . . . you can smell it, hear it, feel it.

This is a great novel. With a huge cast of characters introduced deftly and three-dimensionally, the story didn't drag for a second. I hate being endlessly "explained" to, and here, there is no boring background narrative endlessly rambling on about stuff - especially things that don't matter! [For instance, Bram's relationship with his sister Bianca is mostly revealed in dialogue. What do siblings flick-off about with each other? Not necessarily anything extreme - or interesting. So the author leaves all that out. Interagency infighting? Also done well through suggestive dialogue, not ridiculous posturing.] Revealed information passed on to other characters is not repeated in the narrative, i.e.: recorded telephone conversations already "heard" by the reader are silently consumed by subsequent characters with occasional comments to remind of significant detail or shed new light.

By the time the scene with Simon and Trix fills in some background and missing information, I'm ready for it. If this had come earlier, it might have appeared as an infodump by talking heads. But it's not. I'm ready to have those holes filled in, learn that lacking information. What's more, it's so cleanly structured, so interesting, I'm not even aware I'm being "told".

And yet the economy of Mr. Halm's style did not make the story shallow. There were nice touches of detail - I love knowing what things are called, and Mr. Halm told me all sorts of names of things. And interesting facts: caffeine is toxic to birds. Who knew? I was jazzed to read mention of Toronto Bridge [*Torontobrug*] since I've so often crossed Amsterdam Bridge here in Toronto [these bridges were named in the 'seventies, I believe, when the cities were twinned]. Could I have lived without the autopsy deets? Sure - not because they're gross [didn't bother me], but they didn't directly serve the plot. But Mr. Halm made a good choice leaving those in because the scene fleshed out [so to speak!] some character bits and layered on a significant amount of really interesting info.

There's lots of gearhead/boy stuff: Ducatis and Triumphs and Nortons, oh my! And the novel is threaded with humour - not cheesy one-liners you'd find in an action movie, just human situations and observations.

Some favourite lines [some out of context, of course]:

“That was more accommodating than she’d expected.”

“If I’m getting f***ked, I want to be kissed first.””

“Must’ve been a German shepherd.””

“. . . but if everybody was original, that would become ordinary too, right?””

“You expected something blatant?””

The author keeps the novel from being a mere shoot ‘em up actioner. As a storyteller, Mr. Halm knows how to ply his craft. And it’s about trust - the trust he inspires in his reader. “What’d ya mean?” you ask. Well:

Trust is hard for a reader to find. We’re cynical because we see error all the time in books. We look for it, roll our eyes, assume the author’s forgotten details . . . But by the time blind Bram suggests going to *see a movie* with Katla, Mr. Halm had my trust. Which meant I didn’t even blink over this apparent slip. And when all’s explained half a page later, I breezed by it, nodding; chuckling even. But I didn’t question it in the moment because I already trusted Mr. Halm’s skill. In his writing, nothing is done carelessly. Everything has a purpose. And if Mr. Halm’s eye for detail and excellence in verisimilitude ever wanders into simulacra, I, for one, have neither the competence to say so categorically, nor do I care.

He’s that good.

Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m off to buy the sequel!

Charles says

From <https://ocotilloarts.com/blog> 12 Dec 2014

Reprobate is a thriller, one of a series (Amsterdam Assassins) concerning Katla Sieltjes, a female murderer for hire working under the name Loki. In this incarnation, Katla is hired by some one unknown of a cloud of people and groups in the Dutch drug trade, including the suppliers and their enforcers, and agents of several different European and American police forces. Heroin has been discovered on a NATO base, and the quality of it points to the Dutch as middlemen. (If you think it implausible that Loki would not know who hired her, read the book. Loki’s tradecraft is impeccable, and puts in the shade the ludicrous precautions taken by so many other fictional people who work undercover.)

The set-up takes about a quarter of the book, as there are a great many people and loyalties for Halm to create. This is handled systematically in a series of lucid chapters. The second quarter of the book concerns the hit itself. This is not entirely successful, a mixed outcome which provides the source for the suspense of the second half, for strangely we find ourselves rooting for Katla. Our partisanship is complicated by the presence of a love interest, a blind man, Bram Merleyn. Bram is an entirely admirable character. He is urbane, centered and at ease with his blindness, athletic, and knowledgeable about a great many things including jazz and Japanese. The friendship between these two very opposite people is quite believable in Halm’s hands and offers a number of outcomes, enhancing the story’s suspense. More of the plot I will not reveal.

The author has a detailed knowledge of Amsterdam, as he should since he lives there. He also knows a lot about motorcycles (he owns at least one), scooters, cars, and bicycles. Other matters — guns and knives, Japanese language and food, jazz, cops, autopsies, drug cartels, blindness, saxophones, expensive hotels,

regulations, and so forth — can be acquired by research, and Halm has been assiduous and meticulous. Rather too much so, in some cases, with brand and model names and geographic details. It's a tic, but in many cases it is hard to see what changes might be made without harm to the authenticity of the narrative. Indeed, the liking for these details brings many characters and actions to life. When Katla (in her Loki persona) gets shot in the leg (I will say only so much) the description of the physical consequences is immediately believable.

Reprobate is one of those suspense stories in which the reader finds himself on the side of a character he wouldn't ordinarily. Ordinarily, we would not like to increase the world's stock of assassins. This is Bram's problem. An ordinary thriller seeks only to engage us in the chase. A more ambitious tale must engage our loyalties and morally re-interpret the actions of its characters. Many such stories are built on the detective formula. The hero of a suspense story must, for her own protection, sort out the facts and discover the nature of the threat. The search for truth is always admirable, and gives a story like Reprobate a built-in advantage if the author is intelligent enough to use it. Halm is that, but he also has the brass (and self-confidence) not to let matters rest there. The threat to Katla comes not entirely from out-and-out baddies but from some police agents who we have also come to like, particularly two women. So as the thriller proceeds, the reader finds himself in a quandary. This is also Bram's quandary, and Bram is the moral ground on which the reader will interrogate his own morality.

Being (in part) a search for truth, Reprobate is at first a detective story, not a thriller. We are presented with a crime (albeit remotely, the reported heroin fatality) and a number of applicants for the position of crimesolver. This situation is rapidly overborne. Loki is hired by someone who wants to cover up matters and protect the drug trade. But when the hit goes bad the original drug crime becomes irrelevant. Loki's problem is to identify the villain, as any detective would — that is, the person behind her own attempted assassination — but she is also working against competing detectives who want to know as well her own identity. Part of the suspense of this clever story is how the author will resolve it without either disappointing our loyalties or damaging our respect for the truth.

In the classic period of Holmes and Poirot, the knowledge needed to solve the crime was acquired by observation and reasoning. As the story-line shifted toward the hard-boiled the method shifted to interrogation and confession. At the same time the impetus for the story evolved away from the detective who works in defense of society, to one who works to protect a few people from a corrupt society, to one who works to protect himself. The hero of a thriller works against a society which is set against him not for passing convenience, as in the hardboiled novel, but on principle. The hero of a thriller is a threat to a whole social order. And so the stage is set for a story in which detection is in service to quashing both the criminals and what they stand for and an action hero can be a cold-blooded killer.

The case here is stark. Katla may be working for the wrong people, but she is targeting some people who are worse. She is good at her job, and we tend to root for such people as we do for superheroes. Finally, she has shown us a soft side in her relationship with Bram and in a number of small kindnesses to people she comes across. So the first half of the book resembles a quest story with a twist. It is not until the second half, after Katla is injured, disabled, and under a threat from which her formidable combat skills cannot save her, that the book becomes an out-and-out thriller. By this time we have come to like Katla and are in the habit of rooting for her.

This, of course, can be carried only so far. This is not a hermetic, intellectual literary novel. It's a thriller, we came aboard to be thrilled, and so we are.

Loki, for those who don't know, is a Norse god of considerable importance in the Edda. In Wagner's Das

Rheingold he is the trickster who helps Wotan to get the Ring from Alberich, something of a comedown from his many powers and shape-shifting talents in the older mythology. Our Loki belongs to the Edda lineage.

Kim Jackson says

Move over James Patterson. This is an awesome book. I love the femme fatale character Katla. The author did a good job of developing the character as well as the underlying love interest. This book has definitely piqued my interest in Katla and I look forward to reading more of her adventures. This is an action packed story that kept me interested. The author brought the various story lines together and tied it all up with a neat bow at the end. Great job Martyn, keep them coming.

Anindya says

I received a copy of the book in return for my honest review from the Goodreads group Shut-Up and Read.

I'm sorry I'm late in posting this review, I'm in a busy busy day and I have this troubling internet so... I'm really sorry due to my lateness of my review. Anyway, I started to read Reprobate on April and I just finished it last night. When I requested this copy from Shut-Up and Read programs, it's because one word. Assassin, okay maybe two words... Female Assassin. You know, I'm interested in the Assassin story, I watched Nikita, I'm playing Assassin's Creed so... I thought I'll give this a shot because I really thought this is gonna be sexy.

The main character is a woman named Katla who's really an assassin, with all her skill and her determined character. Katla makes a living on her killing activity. She kills this and that and voila she got money from client. She runs this business under the male name, Loki. One day, when she was doing the job from her client, she met the blind man named Bram Merleyn in the crime scene. Katla who's startled by this meeting –not because there's a dead body in that place but because of Bram's blindness. Anyway, Katla get rid of Bram but...not she decided to not kill this man. Anyway, what can a blind man do, right ? She didn't know that Bram might be more than that. She didn't know that she will be falling in love with him.

Meanwhile, the DEA is in charge of a huge drug dealing crime in Netherland. It's not as easy as it seems. Things falling apart and they started to wonder, maybe there's an inside mole. The DEA and the Dutch IPOL launch a joint undercover operation. But something get in the way... and Katla is in the middle of this.

At first I liked this character but in the middle I started to fear her. She seems really heartless and... well I thought that's make sense. How could you be a sensitive one when you make job with killing. Anyway, this tough Katla, fell in love with Bram, the blind man. Now, this is interesting to me, because Bram is a man with high sensitivity. Maybe because he's blind, he started to FEEL not to see things. And... I can't help shipping them! Maybe they're not a perfect couple but... I guess Katla needs him. Anyway, let's talk about Bram. Bram is not ordinary character and I like how the writer wrote Bram with his blindness, his music talent, his Jazz taste, and his fondness of Japan. Yes, that sounds charming, alright. But you know, it's the same feeling with Katla, he is scaring me. It's because when this two met and Bram eventually knows about Katla, he didn't run. He acted cool. Way more cooler than what I thought it'll be. And that's surprising! I thought this is gonna be like Twilight and more running around between scared and love. But no, their love

life... Katla and Bram isn't ordinary like that.

Aside of this love story line, this book has another power that surprises me. I know, I'm not a professional reader, I'm newbie and English isn't my language so I'm not hard to be surprised. But let me tell you with my own perspective, this book has a very detailed things. The synopsys says, "Reprobate gives a rare glimpse in the local Dutch culture, information on the famous Dutch capital, the narcotics trade, computer hacking, motorcycle gangs, mehndi bridal tattoos, martial arts, and the brutal effectiveness of disciplined violence". That, people, is true. This book has a Dutch culture, all the scooter, all the jogging people, all the bycicle... I love it. Not to leave all the amazing details of Katla's killing, Katla's knowledge of anatomy, about drugs dealing, about the DEA and their strategy... and many more. I can't mention it one by one, but I really appreciated all this little things. There's so much I didn't know in these details.

Although I really appreciate the details, I have some issues too. I found that the conversation actually too long and sometimes there are scenes that's not really necessary added in this story. Maybe if this thing can be shortened, I'll enjoy this book very much because I think the narration is not bad. The changing POVs is quite confusing too, there's so much characters beside Katla and Bram. And sometimes I even don't know what they're talking about. For ex. is the DEA POV, when the story is viewed in their POV, I am lot confused. Because I actually didn't really understand about this drug dealing things, how they dealt with it, the investigation and so on... I really miss Katla and her assassin act when I read things about DEA problems.

Anyway, I really appreciated this book. Thank you for letting me read this book, although I'm late to review this. ? This book makes me want to go to Dutch...and have a macaw! (Didn't I mention before that Katla has this macaw bird ?).

Goodbadbizarre says

SUMMARY

A secretive assassin, Katla, is hired to kill a man in the Netherlands, but in the process is interrupted by a blind man. On a whim, she allows him to live, despite the fact that he is a potential witness. She then proceeds to play a dangerous game of cat and mouse with him throughout the city, brushing ever closer toward the one thing that has always eluded her: an actual human relationship. Meanwhile, Deborah Stern, a DEA agent who is recovering from a harrowing ordeal, is offered a job in the Netherlands. An American soldier overseas has overdosed on heroin, leading the higher-ups to suspect a drug ring targeting the military. Deborah is assigned to apprehend the culprits, but she doesn't know that a mole is feeding important secrets to the members of the drug trade... who, concerned over the DEA's new plans, decide to hire a certain assassin to take care of their problems...

THE GOOD...

1) Awesome beginning

We begin with a cold-blooded assassin doing what she does best: kill people. She uses, of all things, a samurai sword. YES. Awesomeness abounds.

2) Strong female characters

Did we mention that this book has two female leads? Both Deborah and Katla were interesting, fully fleshed-out characters, and it was a real treat for us to read a story that held its two female leads in such high esteem. We liked them both so much that at times it was hard to decide who to root for more.

3) The blind man and the killer

This was a wonderful combination. We really enjoyed the interplay between the assassin and the blind witness. It was fun to watch as they grew closer, to be continually surprised how well they interacted on a personal level, and to discover new aspects of them both as they forged their relationship. At several points, we even came to ask ourselves: who between them is crazier? We normally don't like romances, but this hit in just the right ways, so we give it two thumbs up.

4) Creepiness and suspense

This story has action, but we were more impressed by its ability to hold us in suspense. The tension in many scenes so palpable that we kept on reading far too late into the night, just to see what happened next. The assassin, Katla, has just the right level of creepiness that anyone can tell she is a psychotic. She seriously stalks a blind man after deciding not to kill him; who does that but a crazy person? At one point, the narrator even informs us that "She didn't want to kill him yet." Our response while reading: SAY WHAT? Did the room's temperature just drop five degrees?

THE BAD...

1) Character blitz

There's a point, around 50 pages in, when there's a half-dozen characters introduced in around two pages. This is the most obvious example, but there are other cases of the same or similar. Every so often, there will just be too many characters on the page; too many names flying by, too many people to remember, too many cooks in the kitchen. For the most part, however, the story does manage to keep its focus narrow on a small subset of characters.

2) Not a complete story

The story is full of interesting moments, but it is only the first in a series (fortunately, two other books of the series have also been published, so interested readers don't have to wait). Some people might like that this is a longer story, one that lasts for several books, and that it leaves a good set-up for the next book at the end. However, we prefer when a book contains a story of its own. Of course, that's just personal taste; your mileage may vary.

THE BIZARRE...

1) Parrots are awesome

One of the characters has a parrot that imitates the sounds of an angry dog whenever someone enters the home. This is awesome.

2) Ninja blind man

There's a blind man. He's really good at self defense and calm under pressure, and he also knows a lot of Japanese-related stuff. This is also awesome. (Though, regrettably, he is not an actual ninja.)

...AND THE VERDICT:

This book is GOOD.

It's an impressive set of writing, plot, and suspense. If you like foreign settings, police procedurals, and insight into the criminal mind, then this is a definite plus. All in all, an entertaining read. The occasional action scene left a real punch, while the suspense kept us on our toes throughout. We give special kudos to this author's ability to depict people's relationships. We hope to see this author grow and tackle and even better story next time.

Elaine White says

Author – Martyn V. Halm

Star rating – ★★★★?

Plot – very well thought out and put together

Characters – intriguing, relatable, likeable

Movie Potential – ★★★★?

Ease of reading – really easy to read

Cover – ✓

Suitable Title – ✓

Would I read it again – Yes.

**** I WAS GIVEN THIS BOOK, BY THE AUTHOR, IN RETURN FOR AN HONEST REVIEW ****

I really enjoyed this story. But let me start off by pointing out the one or two things that didn't work for me. They are all because of personal preference. First off, we deal with the FBI, DEA, a hired killer and some experts in this book, so a lot of the 'official' stuff goes over my head. For example, the DEA/FBI talk, the martial arts moves and the technical terms are just pretty words to me, so I had to let my imagination do the rest – not really a problem, but something I thought I should point out. Also, I'm not a big fan of having accents written out. I had to read a few bits of dialogue over twice to figure out the real meaning.

Saying that, the rest is all good. The story started with a fast, great hook that kept me interested. I loved how we were left in limbo at points of the story to jump from Katla's perspective to Deborah or Simon's. I love when we're left on a cliffhanger waiting to find out what's going to happen to our favourite characters while we see what's going on elsewhere. I think the use of the FBI and DEA was a genius touch. It gave me – the reader – the feeling of being 'in' on the secret of what had really happened and waiting to see if the FBI or DEA would cotton on or not, and how.

It did take me a little while to get into the book, but that's just because of the genius of the author's writing. I loved Katla from the minute I read 'Fundamental Error', before jumping into this novel and by the time we moved on from her story I only loved her all the more. Especially when Bram came into the story. He was a class act of a character. He lightened the mood quite a bit, while providing a realistic reaction to Katla's chosen career and personality. I loved that he got to know her for who she was before he knew anything about her job.

I also have to admit that I really liked the little characters: Painless Paul and his grandson, James Creoux, Zeph, Kourou and the Japanese staff. They were all nice touches to an already well written and intriguing story. I liked that we got to know a little about Bram before we 'officially' met him as well. I will admit, however, that when we first met him I got him mixed-up with the elderly man walking his dog outside the store and spent two chapters thinking he was old. Way too old for the way Katla started thinking about him. ;) But, I will blame that on not feeling well and trying to devour the story too quickly.

Having absolutely no experience of Amsterdam at all, I enjoyed getting really vivid descriptions of locations throughout the story. It wasn't overly done or done too often and it let me really set the scene for the characters. I also love the little bit at the back of the book, letting us know what locations are pure imagination, like the amazing Roustabout. I'm a big fan of Jazz, so I was really pleased to have little touches of it creeping into the story every now and then. I like to think that me and Bram would get on really well. I also happen to have a really morbid fascination with murder, crime, crime scenes and forensics so I would have no problem chatting to Katla either.

Overall, I loved the focus on Katla and Bram, even when they weren't directly in the scenes and I thought the gradual development and conclusion of the plot was perfect. It made it more realistic than having everything happen within hours or days when we all know that real life is never that accommodating, especially when it comes to crime scene investigations.

I'm rating this story a 4 instead of a 5 for two reasons: 1) the technical jargon going way over my head and 2) the ending. I think it maybe ended a little abruptly, but I'm undecided of whether this is a good or a bad thing. At the moment it's a bad thing, because I can't go straight into the next book, which I think is the point of the cut off.

However, I will definitely be reading the rest of the series soon.

Selina Liaw says

Books & Sweet Epiphany
www.booksandsweetepiphany.blogspot.com

If you like a kick-ass heroine, multi-talented and a non-judgmental main character, Reprobate is the book for you.

Reprobate has a great start, it'll hook and drag you into the story whether you want it or not.

Katla is an assassin and she is a damn awesome one at that. In fact, she's like the Assassin Creed guy + The HitMan guy all in one.

I love how Martyn introduces the character in the story. Not only that, each and every character has a certain quality about them that I can't get enough.

It is represented through different points of views at different times and it all merges in the end with the crossing of paths with one another.

It is also something like the 'Vantage Point'.

This is also my first time in reading a novel of such storyline. Reprobate is unique and each character compliments one another.

I just want to gush at Katla's abilities. She's just so awesome!

The whole storyline has that quality of a TV Series but if you think that's boring...well, it's your loss. :D I love all the parts where there's action, shooting and killing in it. I love how each and every detail of the kill is being described. It made me feel like I'm actually learning something valuable in the book, not that I WANT to kill someone. It's just knowledge to me.

I believe this book is awesome enough to be in my favourite books list.

Sincerely,
Selina.

Patricia Reding says

I was provided a copy of REPROBATE through Goodreads' Read It & Reap program in exchange for my fair and honest review.

I really wanted not to like Katla/Loki. I really wanted to think that a story about an assassin, entirely amoral—yes, a reprobate in the truest sense of the word—would be so disquieting that it would leave me wanting no more. Instead, I found that Katla was likeable—not lovable—but, likeable and that though she lived by no code that would be readily recognized by most, she was able to—and indeed did—have her own vulnerabilities and feelings for others that helped to make her “human.” As I made my way through, I realized that not only was I enjoying Katla’s story, but that I would be interested in following Katla further.

The characters were well drawn and believable. Katla/Loki acted with precision. If great research had not been done into making her actions believable, it certainly appeared that it had been! Bram was a believable blind man and had the true heart of a musician. The Rastafarian was a simple hearted assistant; Coen a good hearted friend, Focke, a chain-smoking surprise. The FBI, DEA and other government agents pursued their quarry while we saw glimpses into the politics behind the goings-on of international law enforcement. All that said, perhaps my favorite character was Katla’s macaw, Kourou. The pet added realism to the story. Able to bark like a dog, be angry when left for long periods, greet people with the simple query “happy?” and skate his way though Katla’s apartment, Kourou was a unique, fun and well developed character in his own right.

Perhaps the most difficult part of REPROBATE was that the story was located in Amsterdam, where street names and the like are difficult for an American English-speaker to identify. Even so, they added to the foreign feeling of the story and took nothing away from the enjoyment of it.

KATLA was the kind of story I would expect a traditional publishing company to jump at. Perhaps such will be in Halm’s future.

Vicki Wilson says

3.5 stars. I initially struggled to get into this book, but am glad I persisted. The author obviously has extensive knowledge on the subject matter, and has the ability to give Amsterdam a pulse. I even learnt something about Japanese weapons and motorcycle parts, and being Afrikaans I could easily pick up on some of the Dutch words.

My only problem was with the main character, Katla. I found it hard to warm up to how she is portrayed, and even after finishing this book, I still do. I do hope that in the sequels we will get more of an insight into what exactly it is that makes her tick. She comes across as a bit un-female-like, but that being said, she has the ability to make Bram 'see' past what she does for a living, and he accepts it willingly. I am confident that she will probably make me as the reader see past it too in the future. I like an anti-hero, and make that anti-hero a strong woman and I'm sold.

Great read for anyone who enjoys a challenging thriller.

Jen Warren says

What this author does well, he does *very* well. The formatting of this novel is professional in every way; it is impossible to differentiate this from a traditionally-published book. Reprobate is not an amateur attempt of an untrained writer, but a professional end product of a competent author.

That said, I did have a few issues with this novel.

Reprobate is the story of Katla Sieltjes, freelance assassin. The concept of a cold-blooded killer intrigued me, as I've read few novels with such an unusual female protagonist. Anti-heros can be difficult to relate to, and Katla was no exception. The author's description states that this woman has almost no conscience, and I am in complete agreement. Katla is cold and—more often than not—emotionless. I can't say I ever really disliked her, but I missed the connection I rely on to draw me into the story and keep me turning the pages.

I continued reading for three reasons. First, Katla does have a fascinating—though unrelatable—occupation. Her crimes are told in detail, and I found them equally captivating and unsettling. Second, the larger, unfolding plot is interesting. Told from multiple points of view, the tension builds steadily to a conclusion. Third, the humane Bram (Katla's lover) was much more relatable and enjoyable to read than Katla herself, despite his sometimes unfathomable actions.

The great amount of detail within this novel lends authenticity to the story, though it occasionally slows the pace—as do the foreign names sprinkled (seemingly) everywhere. Deciding how I might pronounce them pulled me from the story until, finally, I just started ignoring them.

Overall, I'm glad I took the time to read this. While not perfect, Reprobate is an engrossing tale with a professional feel and no shortage of plot. I'd recommend this to readers of suspense, thrillers, and mysteries.

Actual Rating: 3.5 Stars
