



A Tale Etched In Blood And Hard Black Pencil

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We could tell you about the bodies. We could tell you their names, where they were found, the state they were in. We could tell you about the suspects too, the evidence, the investigators; join a few dots, even throw you a motive. But what would be the point? You're going to make your own assumptions anyway. After all, you know these people, don't you? You went to school with them. We all did. Granted, that was twenty years ago, but how much does anybody really change? Exactly. So if you really knew them then, you'll already have all the answers. If you really knew them then...

Put on your uniform and line up in an orderly fashion for the funniest and most accurate trip back to the classroom you are likely to read, as well as a murder mystery like nothing that has gone before it. Forget the forensics: only once you've been through school with this painfully believable cast of characters will you be equipped to work out what really happened decades later. Even then, you'll probably guess wrong and be made to stand in the corner.

A Tale Etched In Blood And Hard Black Pencil Details

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Author : Christopher Brookmyre

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From Reader Review A Tale Etched In Blood And Hard Black Pencil for online ebook

Tom says

great slang, great swearing, tight plot - a splendid holiday read.

very sharp on the short lifetime of the vernacular in schools - I'm old enough to remember the arrival and departure of "is it chook" as an expression of disbelief, and smiled fondly on seeing it in print.

and I have **absolutely** avoided spoilers - just read and go with the flow!

eggophilia says

You know the feeling that you get when you pick a book randomly out of the bookshelf in a book store or a library, hoping it would be at least not a total sh*t, and it turns out to be a great book? That was how I feel about this book.

It was not totally random, actually. Thanks to Nick Hornby, lately I'm a sucker for anything British. Nope. 90s-to date novels by British male writer, to be precise. This book had a quote from Guardian's review on the cover 'Looks back with a painfully accurate eye... One of the funniest writers in Britain' British and funny. Plus I like the cover. I was so buying it.

It turned out that it's actually Scot instead of British. Same difference? English is already not my first language (third, if you count Sundanese). But after I survived the Scottish dialect, I really enjoyed the book. It IS funny. Cleverly written. Twists that keep you from putting it down. A long journey for the characters, and you seek longingly for the connection. Which kid grew up to be which adult. How they are so different, yet so similar. And the funny thing is, I spent my childhood thousands of miles apart, totally different culture, yet I can totally relate to them (I think I was Helen, if not the girl version of Marty).

After 200 pages or so and I'd already figured out at least 75% of the Scottish, I just realized that there was a glossary on the back. A bit late but still came in handy, not only for reading this book but also for general purpose especially if you plan to go to Scotland. Such as this one

ginger Generic term for carbonated minerals. Despite billions of dollars spent on brand recognition and advertising, in Glasgow, Coke, Pepsi, Seven-Up and Sprite are all referred to as 'ginger'.

or this one

fitba Popular team sport known in some quarters as 'soccer', invented and given to the world by the Scots. English claims to have invented it rest on their having the first Football Association, which proves only that they invented football bureaucracy. Thanks a pantload, guys. You form yet another bloody committee and a hundred years later, we had to put up with Jim Farry.

Shite. Now I have to look for another Christopher Brookmyre's book.

Apu says

I bought this book on a whim in a charity shop, seduced by the bizarre title. One page in, no, make that a couple of paragraphs in and I'm seriously thinking I've wasted £1, I'm never going to finish this book. The problem? Scottish accents! They're bad enough coming out of people's mouths, but at least you can infer much from body-language and tone and if that fails, ask the speaker to repeat themselves. You don't understand them the second time either, but at least the exasperated look on their faces is worth it!

Anyway, heavy Scottish accents, on paper?

I have now given it five, yes FIVE stars! I grew to enjoy the accent as my brain and inner voice started to work in conjunction. The story is interestingly told. In the present day, there are about six characters all related to a couple of murders, be it investigating, being accused of or friends or relatives of them. As the tale unfolds, you get multi-character flashbacks that take you through the school journey of around twenty different people! Don't worry, it's not confusing and it can be followed.

It's these flashbacks that have led me to give the book a five. I can relate to those flashbacks. I was one of those kids (Martin). I can see in all the other characters similarities to many people that I went to school and if truth be told, I'd forgotten about. I recognised the angst. The politics. The fear of being bullied. The fear of being different and the conflicting struggle to be an individual. The school is shit and it is in a shit area, just like my school. Whilst I would never want to relive it, it was hugely enjoyable following all these characters.

In the end, it's all brought together neatly and elegantly.

This book is a great read. And it'll teach you Scottish.

Mark Cowen says

Working my way through Christopher Brookmyre's back catalogue, and have enjoyed them all up until this one. A story in two time frames - an up to date murder investigation where all the protagonists (the police, the investigators, the witnesses and the victim) all went to school together. There's a back-and-forth describing school days which we all can recognise, and is well written, but is harshly interrupted by the present day murder. Of course, the two timelines come together in the end, but until that point, it was like you were reading two different books about two different sets of characters.

Not one of my favourites.....

Lilly Wood says

I would have been happy if this was at least twice as long hehe

Lila says

I love Brookmyre's language, but this is not his best effort. This mystery had so many Scottish schoolyard neologisms that the author provided a glossary at the end of the book to help the reader. School memories at a Catholic school over the passage of many years as experienced by one group of kids is interlaced with the experiences of two now adult figures, a police woman a media-connected lawyer, trying to sort out a murder. Those who know Brookmyre's take on Catholic schools should not be surprised that school officials do not come off well. This is another Brookmyre that will not be easily found in the US.

Carofish says

Love Christopher Brookmyre. Think I should get an audio book though, as it takes me so long to get into the lingo! This is a funny but really sad book about perceptions one develops in the school yard. It's quite brutal and I'm lucky to say, my schoolhood experiences don't seem quite so dramatic after reading this.

Neil Pittman says

All the adult victims, suspects, and investigators went to school together. This story goes back and forth, covering 1st to 13th grade, and the present where 2 of them are dead.

Scurra says

A psychological thriller in which we get to go inside the minds of a whole cast of characters; but rather than explore the complexities of adult life, this book uses the far more traumatic and scarring experience of going to school when personalities are shaped in ways that we never quite understand in later life.

From the first day at primary (when the children learn a lot more than just their names) to the last day at high school (when some long buried truths suddenly come to light) this is clever, funny, sad, everything you want really. The characters voices are crisp and clear, even if you have to remember to pay attention as the nicknames by which they are known continually change, and the various paths that lead them to the tangled and inexplicable crime all feel right - there's even a bit of redemption and closure for many of them which is terrific.

One of the real highlights of the story is the way it allows him to explore the evolving use of language cleverly (the dizzying way in which slang arrives from thin air and then departs; how swearing is used as a grammatical tool, the different levels of maturity and immaturity of the characters etc.) Sure, the glossary is a bit of a cheat, to make it look more convincing, but that's a small nit-pick.

As a crime novel, this is OK. A plausible range of suspects are introduced and means, motive and opportunity are all present and correct even if the critical piece of evidence is withheld until the dénouement. But that's all secondary to the school story - and how wonderfully real it is.

ArtemisKate says

This was a great, great book. I found it at a bookstore in Toberlerone, Isle of Mull, Scotland while on holiday. It is extremely well written and thought out. The final answer is not revealed until the last chapter, and the final pieces are not given until the last section of the book. All the while you are taken through the stories of children as they grow up with flash forwards to some of them as adults - piecing together how they became the adults they are today by looking back at their childhoods. I cannot praise this book enough. I will definitely look at reading more Brookmyre books.

Gill says

A Lancashire lass like me had to channel her inner Rab C. to read this, not to mention the esoteric labyrinth of the world of boys. Keeping track of the characters as their nicknames change and they move from school to adulthood and back requires effort and if you're not a fan of profanity then forget it. All that said, it was a joy to read and the solving of the murder almost an incidental to the real puzzle of what makes us all tick. Gaun yersel, Brookmyre.

David Nelson says

Recommended by Emma and Jim - Emma I may need your help on clearing up a point or two...

So in general I enjoyed this, but it was flawed, and I think I missed a few things.

The school-years sections were definitely my favourite parts. I recognised quite a lot of general childhood tropes in there, as well as some typically Scottish ones. The writing was often really funny - seeing a Primary One kid's thoughtful, very rational inner-monologue and reasoning versus what actually happened or was said was a fantastic juxtaposition. There was a lot to relate to, and I found the school yard politics really interesting, and enjoyed seeing the characters develop.

The present day murder mystery stuff was less strong. My big complaint is that it took a really long time for me to match up the various characters involved in the present day to their school equivalents. This was partly because there were so many characters and it all jumped about a lot, but also it was massively obfuscated by all the nicknames and stuff. I'd say for probably the first half of the book at least I didn't have some of the important characters matched up in my head, so I think I missed a lot of both nuance in the character development, as well as some outright important plot points. I reckon some of that's on me, but some of it is down to poor writing. When I did make these connections though I did enjoy seeing how the characters changed, and thought it was clever how Brookmyre made you change your opinion of them as they grow up, and more is revealed about their personal lives - how and why they behave the way they do.

Possibly as a consequence of this I am not sure I have fully understood the ending. Spoilers ahead... I do not understand Eleanor's role in what happened - she was obviously involved from what is covered in the last exchange, but I am not sure how. And I am also not sure WHY Robbie and James are even trying to hide these bodies in the first place. The whole crux of the story is that these guys are clearly guilty, except that it

turns out they're not. Why did they bother putting themselves in SERIOUS shit and making themselves look guilty of murder when they could've just called it in? And if it was actually Eleanor who was the one who witnessed this, why didn't SHE just call it in? As far as I can gather none of the two/three of them did anything illegal, or had anything to protect. I don't get the motive at all.

The ending left me feeling a bit annoyed and unfulfilled, but overall I did enjoy the writing and black sense of humour, and think I will check out more of his work.

Purple says

A good book, well written with the caustic tongue I've come to expect from Christopher Brookmyre. It switches nicely between now and then, and there are some great moments and situations. However, the main plot you kind of feel is being disguised a bit by the back and forth of the narrative.

The crime is not quite as clever and disturbing as usual, and the writing perhaps a little less turgid. Brookmyre never really gets into his stride with any of the rants that he is famed for.

So all in all, I'd say that this is the worst of his books. That by no means makes it *bad*, it is still considerably better than most of what the competition has to offer, but from Mr. Brookmyre I have come to expect just a little bit more.

Charlie says

A murder has been committed. But, who done it?

In a small rural community, most of the adults have known each other since they were children at school together.

The book travels back and forth between the adults, their reactions to the murder and attempts to find out what happened, and their former selves as children at school where they got to know each other and grew up together. The sneakiness of the plot hinges on the fact that the children sometimes knew each other by nicknames and by surnames, whereas adults they tend to refer to each other more by christian names. This means that you spend a lot of the book trying to work out which child is which adult.

It is a lighthearted book a quick read and a real page turner. There really is nothing very deep about it, but it is a lot of fun and keeps you guessing until almost the last minute.

The Cats Mother says

I didn't enjoy this as much as most of the others of his that I've read, plot not as interesting, too much time on the flashbacks with overly detailed play by play descriptions of school football games and discos, and no characters you can like. It wasn't very funny and the murder mystery not that clever. I like sarcastic black humour but the viciousness of the kids behaviour and casual sadism shown by and towards the kids by both teachers and some of the parents just left a really bad taste in my mouth. It certainly makes me wonder whether my school years were just really lucky, or did Brookmyre have a terrible time of it. There's a lot of 80s scene setting especially with the musical and fashion references, which was amusing since I'm about the

same age as his characters, and I do recognise the obsessions and motivations of many of the kids, although I grew up in London not Glasgow (thankfully.)

You have to bear with or understand a lot of the Scottish slang - it would've been good to know about the glossary at the back to avoid the time wasted trying to google terms like Boat House!

Summary: Martin, sleazy media lawyer, is called back to his Glasgow roots by an old school friend to help defend him from a murder charge as he's been caught disposing of two bodies. One of the victims and the investigating police officer were also all at school together. As more is revealed about each character and their history, your sympathies shift, which is the clever bit, and the reason it still gets 3 stars, and the truth behind the killings is revealed.
