



Stiletto

Daniel O'Malley

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In this spirited sequel to the acclaimed *The Rook*, Myfanwy Thomas returns to clinch an alliance between deadly rivals and avert epic -- and slimy -- supernatural war.

When secret organizations are forced to merge after years of enmity and bloodshed, only one person has the fearsome powers---and the bureaucratic finesse---to get the job done. Facing her greatest challenge yet, Rook Myfanwy Thomas must broker a deal between two bitter adversaries:

The Checquy---the centuries-old covert British organization that protects society from supernatural threats, and...

The Grafters---a centuries-old supernatural threat.

But as bizarre attacks sweep London, threatening to sabotage negotiations, old hatreds flare. Surrounded by spies, only the Rook and two women who absolutely hate each other, can seek out the culprits before they trigger a devastating otherworldly war.

Stiletto is a novel of preternatural diplomacy, paranoia, and snide remarks, from an author who "adroitly straddles the thin line between fantasy, thriller, and spoof " (Booklist).

Stiletto Details

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Author : Daniel O'Malley

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From Reader Review Stiletto for online ebook

Robyn says

So, I enjoyed being back in this entertaining and humorous world, as well as getting to know the 'other side' of the first book - The Grafters. There are some negatives to this one, though - endless miscellany and info dumps. With stronger editing, I think this would have been a better book. But still! If you liked the first one, you'll more than likely like this one!

Jessie (Ageless Pages Reviews) says

I WANT THIS SO BAD.

The first is pretty unknown, which is just too bad. It is weird and fantastical and clever and ripping good fun.

I have been hoping and hoping to see a sequel for Myfanwy & Co. and now I just need to count the days until I actually can read it.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4.5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2016/06/28/...>

I must confess, I only finished The Rook last month when the surprise arrival of a Stiletto ARC prompted me to do some quick catching up with the series, so I can't claim to have waited for this sequel for as long as others. That said though, I was no less excited to jump right in! I loved the first book, and practically dove into this next one straight away.

The first thing you should know about Stiletto is that even though it picks up where The Rook left off, it's also not your typical conventional follow-up. For one thing, Myfanwy Thomas is no longer the main protagonist. Instead, we get two new leading ladies: a Checquy Pawn named Felicity Clements, and a Grafter surgeon named Odette Leliefeld. After centuries of being on opposite sides, the two young women are suddenly thrown together when their respective organizations are forced to make peace in a new alliance. However, putting aside their differences is easier said than done. The enmity between the two groups runs deep, and not everyone is happy about the new partnership. Almost immediately after arriving in Great Britain with the Grafter delegation, Odette becomes targeted by an angry and bitter Checquy agent, and in order to avert diplomatic disaster, a new bodyguard is swiftly assigned to her in the form of Pawn Clements.

Meanwhile, bizarre paranormal attacks continue to plague London, keeping the Checquy busy running around putting out fires. It's all just business as usual...or is it? Do the Grafters in the delegation know more than they let on? What kind of secrets are they hiding from their hosts? Who can they trust? Both factions are on edge, with a fragile peace hanging between them. Surrounded by paranormal dangers, threats of sabotage, and deep-seated hatreds, just about anything can shatter this delicate young alliance.

Not going to lie; I was initially surprised when I started this book and discovered that we'd shifted away

from Myfanwy Thomas as the main protagonist, since the publisher description makes no mention to the contrary. At the same time though, I wasn't especially jarred by the change. Perhaps it had something to do with the short time I had between reading *The Rook* and *Stiletto*, but I found the new voices pleasantly refreshing. Don't get me wrong; I loved Myfanwy and was delighted to see her make a return in the sequel (albeit in a supporting capacity) but clearly the Checquy-Grafter alliance is the key focus here, and there's no better way to portray all the consequences and challenges of the fledgling partnership than to give us a new character from each side. Myfanwy might be the Rook in charge of brokering this deal, but in order to get right down to the nitty-gritty details, we had to go straight to the frontlines with a Pawn.

Enter Felicity. She's a warrior, meticulous and determined. She is also completely loyal to the Checquy, aspiring one day to join the Barghests, their most elite combat force. Trained to fight and protect, Felicity won't flinch from doing what needs to be done either, making her the perfect bodyguard to assign to Odette. Myfanwy Thomas knows she can count on the Pawn to lay down her life for her charge, but given the order, Felicity also won't hesitate to put a bullet in Odette's head if it turns out the young Graftor woman can't be trusted.

This makes the relationship between Felicity and Odette very interesting. For almost the entirety of the first book, we got to hear all about how the Grafters were evil, insane, and brutal enemies of the Checquy. But in this one we get Odette, a mild-mannered and well-balanced young woman who is completely overwhelmed by her visit to London and just wants to make it through the day without starting a war. I loved seeing the Graftor perspective through her eyes. She and Felicity come from two very different worlds, making the early friction between them no surprise, but as the story progresses, a precarious link begins to form between them, making this part one of the more rewarding aspects of *Stiletto*. Whereas in *The Rook* we got to read about Myfanwy Thomas having a relationship with her own pre-amnesiac self, here we actually get to see an incredible example of true female friendship. O'Malley did a great job developing Felicity and Odette's connection.

The fresh focus on the two women also means that technically, *Stiletto* can be read on its own without having to read *The Rook* first, but I wouldn't recommend it. For one thing, although the author does a great job recapping and explaining the important details you need to know (which also helps to refresh memories after four years, I imagine), there are various references and other ties to the first book which will feel a lot more rewarding if you can spot and recognize them. More importantly, the first book was so much fun, you definitely won't want to rob yourself of the experience.

My one and only complaint is that the novel is weighed down here and there by some bloat, but this could simply be a stylistic choice by O'Malley. Huge chunks of history and background information are sometimes injected into the narrative, which was also the case in *The Rook*. Over time, this has evolved to become a part of the series' unique charm, but every now and then it still gets very distracting, taking attention away from the characters and main conflict.

When all is said and done though, I had a great time with *Stiletto*. I don't love it any less than I love *The Rook*—I just love it differently. While the protagonists may have changed, all the ingredients that made the first book great are still there: laugh-out-loud humor, compelling characters, a wonderfully twisty plot, detailed world-building, and amazing super-powers! The Graftor perspective is a welcome addition to this series, and I'm surprised how much I enjoyed reading about the Checquy's former enemies. I'm certainly curious to see how these two organizations will continue moving forward, and I await the next book in the series with much excitement.

Milda Page Runner says

Well, this was fun.

Different from Rook - with two new Povs story feels a bit more spread out and not as intense. Also it doesn't have the mystery element to it - slowly uncovering the secret world – rather dives straight into paranormal action tentacles and all.

If I'd want to grumble, I could mention few slower stretches of Grafter's history in the first third of the book. But I love O'Malley's writing and humour too much, so I won't. :)

All in all I'd say – weaker than the Rook but still very enjoyable read. So if you liked the first book – go for it.

Bradley says

I had a bit of a love/hate relationship with this novel. Unlike the previous one, which seemed slightly easy in comparison, this one had a lot of features that I've grown to hate over the years.

Such as? Action buildups that suddenly cut to long and unasked for history lessons and expositions that sometimes, eventually, bring out an aspect of the story that will, also eventually, fit right into the tale. Unfortunately for me, it kicks me right out of the telling and I've got to reign in all my enormous reserves of patience until the action starts back up again, which, unfortunately, takes a long ass time. And these were rather dull.

I won't say they were pointless, because we eventually get the wraparound and the bow on top, BUT at the time, I'm left wondering where the main characters are and what any of this has to do with the main story we've begun with. Which, by that point, I'd pretty much forgotten, anyway.

Sounds pretty damning, doesn't it?

Well wait a moment. I'd have perfectly loved the hell out of this book if all that extraneous stuff had been omitted or condensed into footnotes or incorporated in MUCH smaller or at least story-integrated ways, and not as hijackers on the plane of my enjoyment.

So honestly, whenever we got back to Myfanwy, Felicity, or Odette, I was fully enjoying the tale again. Hell, it was a very good tale, and not to give away story twists, it's very satisfying on the emotional, strategical, and diplomatic angles.

I really enjoyed learning all about the big bads of the previous book and enjoyed even more to sympathize and empathize with the Grafters. What first appeared to be a simple and weird exploration of biological scariness became a much more complicated and positive, if fantastic, set of expertise. I fully bought it by the end of the novel, which is great.

If it wasn't for the aspects of the writing that kept knocking me right out of my imagination, for all the times I discovered that I wished that I was doing just about anything else but reading, (which is freaking odd, for me,) or for the plain fact that the pacing was constantly in mortal jeopardy, I really would have given this book a five star rating. There's a ton to love, but the exposition WAS NOT IT.

(Even if what I'm calling exposition actually had a self-contained story or stories within it, that actually wrapped up like out-of-time tales, I'll be honest... they just didn't belong here. Maybe somewhere else as side short-stories for die-hard fans, or extras at the end of the novel. I know this is just my opinion, but cutting them right out of the main story would have made the book superior, if not quite as deep. We're not dealing with victorian classics, here. This has all the trappings of a modern UF save the crown secret organization of superheroes joining forces with masters of extreme and esoteric biology sciences, NOT an in-depth exploration of the histories of rather minor character parts that happen to have important but not large page-time.)

sigh

But again, I think the story was damn awesome if we got away from all that. :)

Giovanna says

I received an ebook copy of this book from Netgalley, in exchange for an honest review.

I don't even know what I expected from Stiletto. The Rook was unique and it managed to grab my attention in spite of a slow start and a bit too much info dumping. Unfortunately Stiletto wasn't better than The Rook and considering that the concept wasn't a surprise anymore it didn't satisfy my expectations. Not completely anyway.

> The pacing was lacking a bit of balance. The first half of the story progressed at a snail's pace. It was even quite boring to be honest. The second half was much better, luckily, but I would have liked it more if the plot had some kind of balance.

> The change of pov disappointed me a bit. I really liked Rook Thomas' story and her voice was quite refreshing and sadly I found the new characters less interesting. Stiletto doesn't focus on one character, like The Rook did, but on Felicity, a Pawn, and Odette, one of the Grafters. The problem is that I did not find them compelling, not really well developed. I really appreciated their friendship, because yes to female friendship, but to say that I didn't care much for them in the end would be an understatement. I honestly would have liked it more if the author had kept focusing on Rook Thomas' story and voice. It had much more potential that I would have liked to see in this sequel.

> The plot is complex and that was appreciated. It was certainly well developed and quite clever. In my opinion it is for sure the best thing about the book as a whole.

Overall Stiletto is a good book, even if it is undeniably slow and even slower than book 1, but I expected and hoped for something different. The plot was good, but there wasn't much character development and the new characters weren't as interesting as the old ones. A solid, 3-stars read, but considering the premise and The Rook, I feel a bit let down by this sequel.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

3.5 stars. Final review, first posted on Fantasy Literature. This review contains some minor spoilers for The

Rook, the first book in THE CHECQUY FILES series:

The Checquy, a top secret British agency of people with supernatural powers, are contemplating a peace accord and merger with their hereditary enemies, the Belgian Wetenschappelijk Broederschap van Natuurkundigen (the “Scientific Brotherhood of Physicists”), whom the Checquy dismissively call the “Grafters.” While Checquy members are born with superpowers (some of them very odd, like the ability to implode another person until their whole body is about the size of a head, a process that is invariably fatal), the Grafters get their superpowers through wildly advanced surgical modifications.

In the seventeenth century, the Grafters, on orders of the government, invaded the Isle of Wight with an eye to taking over the British Isles, and had a horrific war there with the Checquy. The Checquy eventually prevailed, but the dreadful toll of the battles and the aftermath, when the British did their best to permanently dismantle the Brotherhood, left each group with a profound hatred and horror for the other that has survived the centuries.

Now the leadership of both groups is pushing for a merger, with Myfanwy Thomas, who was the main character in *The Rook*, as one of the chief proponents of the merger. A group of Grafters is visiting Britain to meet and discuss the terms under which they will join with the Checquy, but the rank-and-file members by and large are still deeply antagonistic toward each other, and find the other group’s powers repugnant and its members abominations, barely (if at all) human.

Stiletto focuses on two young women, Odette Leliefeld of the Grafters and Felicity Clements, a Pawn (soldier) of the Checquy, who give this conflict its human face. Odette is part of the Grafter delegation visiting with the Checquy, and Felicity is assigned to be her bodyguard, and both are unhappy with their forced association. The personal issues between them tend to reflect the status of the merger discussions. Is it possible for them to learn to tolerate and even like one another?

It’s bad enough dealing with the bitter hatred that most of the members of each group feels for the other, but a mysterious and powerful group called the Antagonists has followed the Grafters from the European continent to England, and is trying by any means possible to kill off the merger permanently ... primarily by killing off multiple members of both groups, as well as numerous British civilians who happen to be useful to their battle, or are simply in their way.

I loved the first book in THE CHECQUY FILES series, *The Rook*, but unfortunately *Stiletto* isn’t nearly as compelling a story. Its plot is more fractured and tends to drag or go off on tangents (most of which, though not all, eventually turn out to be relevant to the plot). There was, for example, a subplot involving a British citizen who suddenly develops the ability and compulsion to instantly grow huge crystals out of any hard surface, murdering several people in the process, that could and should have been left on the cutting room floor. The whole novel clocks in at nearly 600 pages, which felt overlong, and the pace often lagged. Somewhere in there, there was a really good 400 page novel.

It may seem odd to talk about believability in a novel built around superpowers, but the idea that the Grafters could develop some of the uncanny powers they had simply through biotechnology, especially beginning in the late 1400s, challenged my ability to suspend disbelief. The depths to which the Antagonists were willing to sink in their fight against the merger between the Checquy and the Grafters also strained my credulity. Intellectually I’m aware that humans can do appalling things because of deeply-held beliefs, but *Stiletto* never made me believe it on an emotional level.

The Rook also had the benefit of Myfanwy Thomas as its main character, with a gripping amnesia plotline,

where Myfanwy, helped along by explanatory letters from her former self, is trying to find out who is attempting to murder her. In *Stiletto* Myfanwy has been relegated to secondary character status. Her replacements, Felicity and Odette, are sympathetic characters, but not nearly as memorable.

On the plus side, O'Malley has a fertile imagination, and this sequel displays that as well as the witty, easily readable style of *The Rook*. *Stiletto* has a dry, tongue-in-cheek type of humor that, though it's occasionally a little forced, still spices up every page and made me chuckle several times. Additionally, as I got further into the book, the plot became more compelling, especially as several plot threads began to tie together in a way that ultimately made the story more cohesive. In the end, despite some shortcomings, it was a worthwhile and enjoyable read for me, enough to make me interested in picking up the next book in this series. If you enjoyed *The Rook*, it's worth reading *Stiletto*, but I'd recommend that you temper your expectations.

Content advisory: R-rated language and some rather gory supernatural violence.

Scott Hitchcock says

3.5*

I think the best part of this book was the humor. Very dry British style thrown in to make the absurd funny. The story itself was OK, mostly predictable. I did like the historical aspect it added. It reads somewhere between James Bond and Bridget Jones.

Hannah says

In the interest of full disclosure I have to admit that I struggle with Urban Fantasy as a genre (which surprises me - because I obviously love Fantasy), so you should take my rating of three stars with a grain of salt.

This book takes off just after the last book ended - the Chequey and the Grafters trying to form an alliance. This process is complicated by the fact that both organisations are indoctrinated to hate the other - which makes sense from an in-story-perspective but still got annoying for me after a while (I mean come on - you have modifications all over your body but the powers the other side has are creepy and vice versa?!). We mainly follow two protagonists - one from every side - and while I missed Myfanwy, I did really like those two women - especially Felicity - and their growing relationship was wonderful to watch.

Overall, I did enjoy this book - I just felt it was disjointed in parts. With this I don't even mean the info dump that everybody complains about - because I happen to really like the world O'Malley created and thus do not mind the info dump at all - I mean that parts of this seem unnecessary and I didn't always understand the decision to include them (such as the crystal serial killer).

But still, the book is a lot of fun, O'Malley creates a vivid and original world and he obviously has as much fun writing these books as his readers have reading them. I am keeping my fingers crossed for this series to continue because when O'Malley gets it right, he gets it brilliantly right. The parts of the book I enjoyed, I really enjoyed.

I received an ebook curtesy of the publisher and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Katie says

It's so hard to be coherent about this wonderful book but I do have a full spoiler free video review of it:
<https://youtu.be/4b85viwCCXM>.

In short though it's funny, thought provoking, bizarre and an all around good time. It totally lived up to my expectations.

I received this book upon request from the publisher in exchange for an honest review

Mike says

Some spoilers for The Rook and this book to follow, so tread lightly good reader.

It may have taken four years but we finally have a sequel to that delightful, quirky supernatural thriller *The Rook*. It was one of my favorite books of 2012 and I was a bit worried about the sequel. I wasn't sure where O'Malley would be able to go after the conclusion of *The Rook*. I was also worried that Myfanwy Thomas, the protagonist from the first book, was too powerful to serve as an effective focus for a sequel (her powers got pretty close to over-powered territory by the end of *The Rook*). I was concerned it was taking so long to come up (same worry goes for *The Winds of Winter*). Mostly I was worried that O'Malley had blown his wad with *The Rook* and was floundering.

But I should not have worried. O'Malley delivers a great follow up that does a wonderful job exploring the world further, introducing us to a bunch of great characters, and maintains that wonderful dry British humor that so endeared me to *The Rook*:

"And the red button fills the room with fire. Don't worry, though. The really heavy fire will be centered on the table, so if you have to hit the button, be sure to step back as far as possible."

"But the whole room is filled with fire?"

"Only a light fire."

So where we last left off the Checquy (Britain's Supernatural Secret Service) they had just fought off an attack by the Wetenschappelijk Broederschap van Natuurkundigen (the "Scientific Brotherhood of Physicists" or, as the Checquy refer to them, the Grafters), an ancient enemy the Checquy had thought destroyed centuries ago. But instead of escalating into an all out war pitting the supernatural against science (albeit SUPER advanced biological science) the Grafters are interested in a merger instead. So where we had a mystery of who stole Myfanwy's memories from *The Rook*, we have a more diplomatic cloak-and-dagger story-line in this one. Which leads to some of the aforementioned new characters, both from the Grafters and the Checquy.

First up the Checquy. O'Malley made a wise decision to both keep Myfanwy in the story (tough not to since

she is a high ranking member and spearheading the merger) but had her share most of the spotlight with the newcomers. I would say O'Malley had a great balance between Myfanwy and the other characters, with them taking center stage but Myfanwy still playing a vital role. The other major Checquy character is Felicity, a pawn with the capacity of reading an object's past (which she ends up doing REALLY neat things with). She is a soldier but ends up being put on diplomatic duty minding one of the Grafters envoys.

That envoy being Odette, one of the great many times over granddaughters of the founder and current head of the Grafters (*"In the beginning, the mission of the Broederschap had been simple research - pushing the boundaries of human knowledge, gaining a greater understanding of the glory of God's creation, and extending everybody's life span to ensure there was enough time to get a REALLY GOOD understanding."*). She is young, but a brilliant medical doctor having been groomed to it from a very young age. She and the rest of the Grafters are harboring a dark secret though (because of course they are), one that threatens the talks and the supernatural peace of Europe.

One thing I greatly enjoyed about this book was seeing things from the Grafters' point of view. In *The Rook* we see the Grafters has terrible flesh sculptors who create unnatural and deadly biological weapons. But in this book we see that they are just scientists, exploring the natural world to its fullest extent (previously they were co-opted and betrayed by a national government, a mistake they swore to never make again). In fact they see the Checquy as monsters because the gifted members do not conform to natural laws.

Just calm down. These people may be monsters, but they're professionals, and they're upper class and British, so they'll be polite.

It was fascinating to see how the prejudices of both sides played out over the course of the book and negotiations. A good lesson for us all in this non-supernatural world we live in.

Another great thing about this book was how the relationship between Odette and Felicity developed over the book. Starting with the suspicions and ingrown prejudices that come from never actually meeting a member of a group, their shared experiences and tribulations forged them into a great friendship built upon trust and respect and fashion disasters:

They regarded the dress in respectful silence. It was the kind of respectful silence heard at ceremonies held to commemorate disasters.

"I'm no expert in dresses," said Felicity finally, "but that... that's not a good dress, is it?"

"I know what I want to say," said Odette, "but I am mindful of my role as a diplomatic envoy here to make peace between our people."

...

"If Judas Iscariot were alive, and a woman, and attending formal functions, wearing this dress would still represent a disproportionate punishment for his sins."

"Her sins."

"Right. Anyway, I have a spare dress you can wear."

I loved both of them and the entire Grafter entourage:

"So, you clone things?"

"We can. We don't, though, not usually. Of course, we grow bits of people, but we don't make whole people."

"Why not?"

"We prefer sex. Plus, anyone who wants to clone himself is usually an asshole. You don't want any more of those running around than absolutely necessary."

The entire Grafter outlook on life and how it contrasted with the Checquy was fascinating to read about and I think will serve future books (which I really hope get written) very well. For instance the Checquy, for all they do to control their employees, does allow them the autonomy to pursue the path through the organization they most want to. For instance Felicity's power (being able to read an object's past) would make her very useful for research purposes but she aspires to be among the organization's elite soldiers. She is allowed to pursue this dream (already making good progress when the book opens) though they do occasionally call her in to do some important object readings. Odette, on the other hand, was pretty much directed down the path of being a medical doctor with little input from her. She loves what she does and has learned, but reflects, after seeing the opportunities Felicity has, that she would have liked a little input on the matter. Like I said a really interesting contrast of organizational cultures.

Unlike the end of *The Rook* I think there are a lot of neat places this series could go. There is an off-hand passage about a bunch of other supernatural agencies worldwide and I think it would be cool to explore a more international scene in any eventual third book. Heck, it almost makes perfect sense: *The Rook* was mostly England-centric, *Stiletto* introduced some European flavor, so the next one ought to keep pulling the view out and encompass more of the world. We'll see, though hopefully in less than four years this time.

I did have a few qualms about the book though. I thought the story wasn't as tight as it could have been with a few superfluous plot lines and the ending, while appropriately foreshadowed and perfectly reasonable, seemed a bit abrupt and lacked the payoff I was hoping for.

Still, it was a hell of an enjoyable ride and anyone who liked *The Rook* will also greatly enjoy this book as well!

And now some choice quotes because O'Malley's writing style and sense of humor just hits my funny bone in all the right places:

This is why you should always pack backup backup clothes: *In an effort to muster every shred of authority when interacting with Pawn Clements, she had put on her tallest, most expensive stiletto heels and her third-best suit (the best and the second-best no longer constituting appropriate business wear except in abattoirs, seances, or, possibly, highly specific erotica).*

Just like every other European Monarch with an illustrious family tree: *Carlos II's ancestors had been marrying their close relations for so many generations that the scion of the line suffered from uncountable intellectual and physical difficulties and indeed was technically his own cousin, his own cousin once removed, and his own second cousin.*

We all have out pet peeves: *"They have opened another bottle of champagne."*

"It is now two in the morning. Surely they cannot stay in the park forever."

"Screw the plan! Even if they were not the Antagonists, these creatures need to die. Staying in the park after closing time - it is disgusting behavior. The park is closed for a reason."

Workplace safety means something different to the Checquy: *"She had a gun? I thought people in this country didn't carry firearms."*

"Oh, everyone who works in the morgue is required to carry a pistol at work. And we keep a shotgun and a flamethrower on hand, just in case."

The Audit is mightier than the sword: *His career was marked by impressive highlights. He fabricated an outbreak of meningitis so that the entire nation was inoculated against mind-controlling maggots. He drove a Gorgon out of the country, not through any supernatural or military means but rather by unleashing constant audits upon her personal and business finances.*

That would be a hell of a super power for some people: *"They're Mouse A and Mouse A(i)," said Alessio, somehow managing to convey through speech the presence of parentheses and a lowercase Roman numeral one.*

This would make for a great Family motto: *"When you go back in, try the ceiling. Bad shit always tends to drop in you from the ceiling. It's like getting attached by clichés."*

Carol. says

Oh, Stiletto--

How I wanted to love you! How I wanted to immerse myself in your pages. I wanted laugh out loud at the Chequey's zany monster encounters, chuckle at the witty dialogue and zip along with an intriguing plot. I wanted to enjoy intriguing characters with bizarre talents running around London.

Instead, I have a young woman mourning a lost love and baffled by her inclusion into a diplomatic mission, the slow pace of the diplomatic mission interrupted by mysterious deaths, and the even slower pace of the generations of Grafter political activity. Critical eye-rolling junctures include an almost-rape scene that feels like it is meant to be empowering but isn't (once again, the male perspective, ugh), the ages old plot device of Keeping Very Big But Unimportant Secrets Until the Last Minute and the realization that the Lost Love is actually an important plot line, not just characterization.

This could have benefited with some heavy editing and some reflection, not necessarily in that order. The aforementioned rape scene was off in tone, and my co-reader Naomi also noticed it right away. It sets the tone in a weird male-perspective way, much like in *The Rook* when Mufawny was staring at the mirror and examining her boobs (or however that played out; I remember it as a pivot point for some readers). When Something Big happens to that team, the tone of frivolity is lost. It was a serious plotting mistake, as it suddenly made much of the asides, the silliness, and even other characters' actions seem thoughtless and callous. I think O'Malley might have been looking for a story parallel to the whiz-bang opening of *The Rook*, but in this case it failed. (view spoiler)

I kept this book around for weeks, hoping to re-read it and convince myself otherwise, but I just lack the will. Too many of its weak point play into areas unimportant to me, so your mileage may vary. It turns out that this was the longest book I read in 2016; telling, I think, that it should have been shorter. Sometimes, More is Just More, publishing industry! Maybe one day I'll give it another shot, but it seems unlikely. The overall structure with a particular story-line ending proved too disappointing.

Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says

Well damn it. I was hoping this was going to be a 5 star sequel.

It still had some humor and bizzare stuff but it wasn't great to me. ? I liked well enough though.

Felicity kept her gun and her eyes firmly pointed at the man. Unfortunately, that meant that she got a good look at his backside. It was hairless, but then, so was the rest of him. Or at least, the parts that she could see. There was no hair on his scalp, but was a set of curious bony ridges ringing his head. His skin was paper white and shone like glazed porcelain.

As she peered closer, she saw that he was actually covered in tiny, perfect, polished scales. He was tall and slim.

The man finished and took his foot off the pedal off the rubbish bin, sending the lid down with a clang. To Felicity's consternation, he then turned around. He didn't look over his shoulder, and he didn't cover himself up. Despite herself, she looked at his penis.

Okay, that's. . . unorthodox.

Instead of any form of genitalia with which Felicity was acquainted, the white man's groin sported a smooth skin of those tiny white scales that shivered and locked together seamlessly before her eyes.

Happy Reading!

Mel ♥?

mark monday says

page turner, page turner! supernatural and super-scientific terrorist attacks are rocking London! as always! the super powered super secret agent club called The Checquy that protects UK interests sure do have their hands full! it's a good thing nearly all their agents have super powers like vanishing and spouting green fire and microscopic vision and turning air hard and looking through walls and reversing their aging process so they can be the Amazonian goddess they were back in yesteryear! go, Checquy, go! save England, you can do it!

much like its predecessor, Stiletto's narrative is propulsive. this is an exciting book and I had a fun time reading it. O'Malley doesn't necessarily expand his world; instead he just lets the reader live in it - this time we get to see it both from the inside and the outside, rather than being slowly introduced to it by an amnesiac protagonist. he's a confident writer who clearly had a great time writing this, and he wants his readers to have the same great time. the sheer enthusiastic bravado on display often helped me rush past the novel's flaws: haphazard storytelling that is often (frustratingly) episodic despite the tension of the overarching narrative; an unappealing lack of interest in the deaths of many brave supporting characters; weak motivation for its villains; a lot of repetitiousness; a strident snarkiness that is dialed a bit back from *The Rook* but is still worthy of a few cringes. I liked this book quite a bit although sadly its bloat really displayed its flaws. it should have been trimmed to at least two-thirds its current length.

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Celeste_pewter says

Every year, there will be at least a few books where I'll finish the book and think: "Damn it. Can I just write a GIF-filled review and call it a day? Because there's no way I can do the awesome of the book justice with my review."

?Unfortunately for me, and fortunately (?) for all of you: I don't have good GIF game. So I'm going to hunker down and do my damndest to explain:

- * Just why Stiletto was worth the four-year wait,
- * How Daniel O'Malley is clearly a badass feminist, who writes excellent female characters, and
- * Why I will be highly suspicious of anything citrus-scented from here on out.

?Ready? Then read on for more!

Things that worked:

Characterizations:

If there's one thing readers likely learned from *The Rook*, it's that Dan O'Malley writes damned good female characters. Myfanwy Thomas was a super powered everywoman, with the humor, snark and organizational capabilities that made her unforgettable to every reader.

So it's probably unsurprising to say that the two female leads of *Stiletto*: Pawn Felicity Jane Clements and Gafter Odette Leliefeld, are every bit as compelling as Myfanwy. Though Felicity and Odette are clearly from two very different worlds, O'Malley does an exceptional job of showing how they both fit seamlessly into the greater Checquy/Gafter merger puzzle.

Felicity and Odette's relationship naturally evolves as the book progresses, beginning with them meeting as adversaries, and eventually moving into hesitant friendship. Along the way, O'Malley does a nice job of using their personalities and backgrounds to flesh out the institutionalized hatred between the two groups, and also helps to emphasize the challenges of being young and female, in changing, complex environments.

Through trial and error, both girls individually come to learn that the other has strengths and gifts that are not dissimilar to their own, and their eventual friendship is a great reminder of just what it means to have an ally in challenging situations.

Writing/World-Building:

So let me get this out of the way: yes, *Stiletto* is a very long book. It's actually about 100 pages longer than *The Rook*, which was already a very long book.

(Fun fact: the *Stiletto* audio book is about twenty three hours to *Rook*'s sixteen.)

But it's evident from the first few chapters, that the added length is exactly what O'Malley needed to flesh out this new and slightly more complex world. He uses those pages to great effect; not only building on the quirky, super powered world of the Checquy, but also crafting - pun intended! - a convincing, heartbreaking foundation for the Grafters

There's an inherent logic for how the Grafters came to be, and just how the hatred between the Checquy and the Grafters initially developed. Though the history was a tad more than I needed a times, it's an absolutely convincing look at just how everything has been building to this moment, and for Odette's delegation to pave the way.

As for the actual writing? Dan is as funny, detailed and necessarily succinct as ever. Both of his female voices are strong in third person, and have quirks, tics and thoughts that soundly differentiate them from one another. Just like *The Rook*, there were bits of dialogue and description that I just wanted to reread over and over, which made the reading process probably longer than it had to be.

The supernatural elements/the surgical elements :

Outside of outdoing himself by coming up with more inventive powers - a conversation with a group of Pawns about white people and wasps had me chuckling out loud - O'Malley also uses the Checquy powers and the Grafter surgical skills to ask some pointed questions about talent, power and how one can choose to use and/or misunderstand those gifts.

Both the Grafters and the Checquy are initially equally fascinated/repulsed by each other's abilities, and O'Malley shows what it takes to get the two sides to bridge their differences. It's a process that takes repeated effort and diplomacy, and the hurdles scaled are often painful moments that come with trial and error.

The distrust on both sides serves as a reminder of just how easy it is to judge because of institutionalized behavior, and how often it might take extraordinary circumstances to bridge that gap. O'Malley gives repeated nods to the fact that it's not, and will never be easy to find a steady peace between the two groups, but also shows how easy it can be - *vis-a-vis* Myfany, of all people - to not hate, if it's not part of the culture - something that readers will likely ruminate over.

Interpersonal power politics aside, O'Malley also asks readers to consider just how easily it is to abuse an extraordinary gift like a Checquy power or Grafter skills. It's an acknowledgement of the idea that with great power comes even greater responsibility, and will likely encourage many a reader to consider just how they'd handle such gifts.

(On a slightly less serious note: Thanks for ruining my love of citrus forever, O'Malley.

Just kidding. I kid.)

?

On relationships, and how it relates to the greater good:

While *The Rook* was more or less centered on the idea of Myfanwy learning how to come to terms with her new self, *Stiletto* is very much a book about relationships.

There's the core relationship between Felicity and Odette, which has its ups and downs, and super-powered learning curve. But there are also the relationships that the two women have within their own lives, which impact their development and contribute to the overall story.

Without giving spoilers away, O'Malley meticulously uses these relationships to ask time and time again, what individuals like Felicity and Odette value in a world where one wrong move in the merger can result in a supernatural war.

There are repeated challenges to just what both women hold to be true, including some fairly specific instances that question their agency, and whether the two women are willing to surrender their own beliefs to the merger - both voluntarily and involuntarily. It's tricky territory to navigate, but O'Malley hits the right note on how he chooses those relationships to ask those larger-scale questions, including some brutal moments where both women are forced to question what they know to be true.

Outside of our two female leads, the book is sprinkled with family relationships, friendships - including some familiar faces (!) - and even adversarial relationships that really help emphasize the point that as intriguing as their supernatural or surgical powers may be, the Checquy and Grafters are still at their core,

made up of interpersonal relationships which help drive the narrative (and drama!) forward.

And finally...

The ending:

Though he shines when it comes to writing action scenes, O'Malley also has a gift for writing quieter, introspective moments.

As the book winds down, O'Malley does a nice job of not only tying together loose ends, but setting up a firm foundation for the potential future of his cast of characters. We see how Felicity, Odette and the secondary characters have reached and evolved to this point, and it sets up a nice, optimistic foundation for the future of the merger.

Though it seems clichéd the call the ending cinematic, it really is. And this is a good thing.

Things that didn't work/Things to consider:

While I'm tempted to say absolutely nothing, I will acknowledge that the synopsis of the book is a tad misleading.

It definitely gives readers the impression that Myfanwy is the protagonist of Stiletto, when the focus of the book is solidly on Felicity and Odette. Though I personally didn't mind this shift, I do think that some of the readers who were especially attached to Myfanwy may initially feel a bit let down.

However, let me just reassure all prospective readers right now: Felicity and Odette more than make up for any lack of Myfanwy. They're collectively badass in their own right, and Myfanwy's brief appearances just round out an already solid novel.

Final verdict:

After four years of waiting for a return to the world of the Chequy, I can absolutely say that Stiletto was worth it.

Outside of being a fun, well-written romp in a world where every minute spent is a worthwhile one, Daniel O'Malley has also written a great tale on what it means to be young, female and living in a supernatural world on the brink of change.

Felicity and Odette begin Stiletto with seemingly nothing in common, but conclude the novel recognizing that there is a universality in their goals, aims and even their very understanding of the world around them. O'Malley's essentially written a parable on learning how to walk a mile in another's shoes, and readers will likely come away having learned a little bit from that journey.

Highly recommend for all readers, full stop.

(In fact, why are you still reading this review? Go buy the book already!)

Book Riot Community says

I hadn't planned to pick this book up. Paranormal secret agents in London merging with their ancient enemies, a bunch of mad scientists from Europe? Eh, not my thing, I thought. I was so wrong. I haven't been able to put *Stiletto* down. It's funny, and gross, and imaginative, and weird, and it keeps me up late at night because it's such a page-turner. This is the sequel to O'Malley's first novel, *The Rook*, which I haven't read, so I can verify that it stands alone.

— A.J. O'Connell

from The Best Books We Read In June 2016: <http://bookriot.com/2016/06/29/riot-r...>

mark monday says

page turner, page turner! supernatural and super-scientific terrorist attacks are rocking London! as always! the super powered super secret agent club called The Checquy that protects UK interests sure do have their hands full! it's a good thing nearly all their agents have super powers like vanishing and spouting green fire and microscopic vision and turning air hard and looking through walls and reversing their aging process so they can be the Amazonian goddess they were back in yesteryear! go, Checquy, go! save England, you can do it!

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Cece (ProblemsOfaBookNerd) says

*3.5/5

An excellent sequel and an enjoyable book overall, but it was far too long and had a few really unnecessary storylines that detracted from the central plot. However, I did love the two new POV characters in this one. The rotating perspectives worked really well and I think expanded on the world of the series phenomenally.

Arielle Walker says

After being less than impressed with The Rook (fun to a point, but not particularly noteworthy in my opinion) I hadn't really seriously intended to read this sequel. Maybe pick it up in a few years time, in a spare moment, if I had the time and inclination etc etc

Well, I actually read it last week, sort of by accident. It was sitting there at the library, in pride of placed, and I grabbed it on a whim. I'm so glad I did.

Stiletto is serious fun. The characters are well-rounded, the humour balances out, and the level of grotesque is fantastically high - in a good way, this time. Odette and Felicity make for fantastic leads, and Myfanwy's reappearance in a less starring role is welcome. The enemy is more believable this time around, and therefore hugely more frightening. Daniel O'Malley is clearly finding his strengths as an author, and far from my unenthusiastic response to the first book, I will happily look forward to the next in the series!

Sylvain Reynard says

Well written and engaging. I enjoyed this book very much. Hoping there's a third volume in the series, SR
