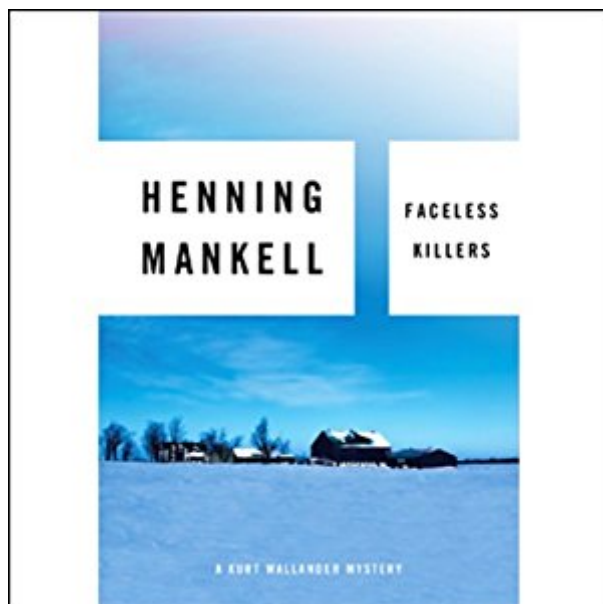


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Faceless Killers: A Kurt Wallander Mystery



Synopsis

One frozen January morning at 5am, Inspector Wallander responds to what he believes is a routine call out. When he reaches the isolated farmhouse he discovers a bloodbath. An old man has been tortured and beaten to death, his wife lies barely alive beside his shattered body, both victims of a violence beyond reason. The woman supplies Wallander with his only clue: the perpetrators may have been foreign. When this is leaked to the press, it unleashes a tide of racism. Wallander's life is a shambles. His wife has left him, his daughter refuses to speak to him, and even his ageing father barely tolerates him. He works tirelessly, eats badly, and drinks his nights away. But now Wallander must forget his troubles and throw himself into a battle against time and against mounting racial hatred. It is the winner of the CWA Gold Dagger for Sidetracked. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Now this was a find. Recently, I was reading book reviews in either Booklist or Library Journal and came across a rave for the latest Mankell translation, One Step Behind. When my next opportunity to order a few books came around, I put several Mankell titles on the list and Faceless Killers is the first in his Kurt Wallander series. Mankell is a Swedish author and his books are translations and have been hailed as the first series to truly live up to the standards set by authors Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahloo and their Martin Beck mysteries. I can't comment on that, never having read a Martin Beck, but I sure enjoyed this book. As the story opens, an elderly farmer discovers that

his neighbors, also elderly, have been attacked. The husband has been gruesomely tortured and killed and his wife left for dead. Before she dies in the hospital, her last word is "foreign." With anti-immigrant sentiment running high already, the last thing the police need is for this to slip out to the media, but someone in the department leaks the information and suddenly refugee camps in the area are being firebombed. When a Somali refugee is killed, seemingly at random, Wallander and his men have two difficult cases to untangle. This was a very strong mystery, with a great central character and careful attention to settings. Wallander is cut from the same cloth as John Rebus and Alan Banks. He's struggling with loneliness after his wife has unexpectedly left him and his close ties with his daughter have been severed. He has to deal with an aging, possibly senile, father and his attraction to the new female district attorney who is filling in on an interim basis, and who happens to be married.

Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahloo invented the modern Swedish police procedural with their ten-book Martin Beck series, which ended in the late 1970s. Mankell picks up where they left off, introducing a new weary policeman with this first in the Kurt Wallander series, which was originally published in 1991. Just as the Martin Beck series was a lens for the authors' liberal view of a changing Swedish society, Mankell uses the crime novel as a way of addressing the dilemmas of modern Sweden. In this first book, an elderly couple in the southern coastal town of Ystad are brutally tortured and murdered, and the only clue is the word "foreigners." As there are a number of refugee camps in the nearby countryside, the issue of immigration and asylum becomes central to the story. With the chief out of town, Wallander spearheads the investigation into the apparently motiveless crime, while at the same time struggling to cope with his disintegrating personal life. His wife has just left him, his teenage daughter is estranged from him, and his aging father gives new meaning to the word cantankerous. It doesn't help that Wallander eats junk food for meals and drinks himself to sleep. Soon a firebombing of a refugee camp increases the pressure for a quick solution, and then a Somali is shotgunned to death, making for even more problems. Despite the best efforts of Wallander's team, they just can't seem to get anywhere as the months drag on. The breakthrough that leads to the solution seems to come out of nowhere, but it works nonetheless. The story is written in prose that can perhaps best be described as methodical, and when combined with the bleak weather, it ably captures the reserved nature of Scandinavia. The immigration issue is handled fairly well and raises difficult questions.

Henning Mankell was a new writer to me, but having seen comparisons of his genre fiction with that

of Ian Rankin I tried this novel. This is the first in Mankell's Inspector Wallander series. Set in rural Sweden it is a police procedural. The opening chapters of the novel are gripping. It begins with a vicious murder to which Wallander is called. There are few clues, other than the last word of the second murder victim, "Foreigners". When news of this leaks out Wallander is drawn into a series of racially motivated incidents, and investigations around camps holding asylum seekers. The tension is built up well in the first half of the novel, and the investigation of the murder, and the racial incidents, maintains high interest. The second half of the novel is more slackly paced, the denouement slightly disappointing. Wallander is a fascinating character, and while the novel is third person narrative, so much is written from Wallander's perspective that the novel might as well be in the first person. Wallander is not the most likeable of characters. He has a strained relationship with his father and daughter, has recently separated, and falls into a number of stereotypes as the "loner" cop. Wallander's flaws, his racism (his observations on asylum seekers, for example), and his misogyny, for example, create a rounded well-drawn character. You may not like Wallander but so crafted is the character that his motivation is comprehensible. However, the depth given to Wallander means that supporting characters suffer. Wallander's father - never satisfied, slightly ill-tempered, and suffering from a serious illness - has potential to be an interesting character, but seems instead to act as a checkbox to note Wallander's family troubles.

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