



Faceless Killers

Henning Mankell , Steven T. Murray (Translator)

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It was a senselessly violent crime: on a cold night in a remote Swedish farmhouse an elderly farmer is bludgeoned to death, and his wife is left to die with a noose around her neck. And as if this didn't present enough problems for the Ystad police Inspector Kurt Wallander, the dying woman's last word is foreign, leaving the police the one tangible clue they have—and in the process, the match that could inflame Sweden's already smoldering anti-immigrant sentiments.

Unlike the situation with his ex-wife, his estranged daughter, or the beautiful but married young prosecutor who has piqued his interest, in this case, Wallander finds a problem he can handle. He quickly becomes obsessed with solving the crime before the already tense situation explodes, but soon comes to realize that it will require all his reserves of energy and dedication to solve.

--back cover

Faceless Killers Details

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From Reader Review Faceless Killers for online ebook

gwayle says

Do these get better? I flew through this first in the Kurt Wallander series, but the writing was squarely in the spectrum of unremarkable to outright you've-got-to-be-kidding-me. The police officers are barely differentiated (Wallander himself is the only one with any character traits to speak of, and he comes across as kind of a schmuck), and the book cries out for description and emotion. Not really psychological and only half-heartedly political, this novel strikes me as gratuitous and forgettable.

Peter Fogtdal says

Henning Mankell might be the most famous Scandinavian writer of crime novels in the US. May I humbly ask why? I can think of at least three Swedes and two Danes who are far, far superior. And let's not forget the Norwegians. Read Frederik Skagen for Christ's sake. I'm not sure he's been translated but he's brilliant when it comes to the twisted mind of killers and rapists.

Actually, I don't like being hard on writer colleagues, but this book is simply not very good. The prose is flat, only two of the characters come alive for me, and I was a tiny bit bored as well. I made the mistake of teaching this novel at Portland State University and my students absolutely hated it. Every single of them. I didn't though. I like the portrait of the main character and the small meditations on immigrants and racism in Sweden.

Ben Loory says

it was 15 pages before the end before anyone in the police department thought to follow the most obvious trail. i mean i'm not even *trying* to solve the case, i'm just lying in bed sick, idly flipping 250 pages, but i'm ahead of these people? pretty sad. in the meantime there's no suspense, the characters are dull, and the scenes are boring and poorly written. nice title, though, i suppose... can't imagine reading more of these...

Harry says

Book Review

Faceless Killers, a 1991 novel and the first in the Kurt Wallander series, delves right into Mankell's favorite pet peeve: the changing political and social landscape of Sweden and in particular the influx of immigration and asylum seekers allowed into Sweden seemingly without barriers.

The plot arises like a Phoenix from this backdrop of which Mankell is a crucial source both personally and professionally as enlightening the world to such problems. It is no mistake that it is a Somali that suffers at the hands of nationalists. Mankell has a great history with Africa. It is no mistake that what allowed for the crime to take place is a bureaucracy hopeless tangled up in its loose enforcement of Sweden's immigration

laws if not a national willingness to let anyone into Sweden after the fall of communism.

This is a dogged story. It happens across a span of months, not days. It is a story of patience, of relentless police procedurals, of an alertness to the seemingly obvious. We gain insight into Kurt Wallander's personal life: Linda, his daughter, his senile father the artist; his sister with whom he is not close; his former wife Mona and his imminent divorce. We are introduced to his fellow detectives: Hanson, Martinson, Bjork, the newly arrived prosecutor Annette Brolin, Ebba the administrative assistant, an ailing colleague, Rydberg.

We explore the setting for the novels: Ystad, the southern shore of Sweden, rural but close enough to Stockholm to conform to the general tendency of Swedish writers to locate crimes near or in urban areas (there are exceptions to this, including Mankell). Wallander's home is on the beach. His proclivity is to let his subconscious reign while not at the office, to allow what he knows subconsciously to slip his mind in order to gain the focus he needs: walks on the beach, his intense interest in opera, his stereo equipment, standing in the rain, and single malt scotch.

The crime, as in early Viking bloody sagas, is horrendous. The solution often at odds with the chronology of a clock. As humans, we must allow all that thinking to coalesce in our subconscious so our mind can recognize the patterns, a subconscious that feeds itself from what Kurt sends it is ultimately responsible for the crime's solution.

Series Review

Henning Mankell is an internationally known Swedish crime writer known mostly for this fictional character Kurt Wallander. He is married to Eva Bergman.

Henning Mankell - Author

It might be said that the fall of communism and the consequent increase in Swedish immigration and asylum seekers has been the engine that drives much of Swedish crime fiction. Mankell's social conscience, his cool attitude towards nationalism and intolerance is largely a result of the writer's commitment to helping the disadvantaged (see his theater work in Africa). In this vein, readers might be interested in his stand-alone novel *Kennedy's Brain* a thriller set in Africa and inspired by the AIDS epidemic (Mankell often traveled to Africa to help third world populations); or read his *The Eye of the Leopard*, a haunting novel juxtaposing a man's coming of age in Sweden and his life in Zambia.

Mankell's love of Africa, his theater work on that continent, and his exploits in helping the disadvantaged is not generally known by his American readers. In fact, an international news story that has largely gone unnoticed is that while the world watched as Israeli soldiers captured ships attempting to break the Gaza blockade, few people are aware that among the prisoners of the Israelis was one of the world's most successful and acclaimed writers: Henning Mankell.

It is no exaggeration when I say that Henning Mankell is by far one of the most successful writers in Scandinavia, especially in his own country of Sweden. The Nordic weather, cold to the bones, drives its

populace indoors for much of the year where cuddling up to read the latest in crime fiction is a national pastime.

For many GR readers who have been introduced to Kurt Wallander it is interesting to note that ultimately the success of bringing Mankell to English speaking audiences only came after bringing in the same production company responsible for Steig Larsson's Millennium trilogy for the wildly popular BBC version starring Kenneth Branagh. Viewers had no problem with an anglicized version of Mankell's work, an English speaking cast set down in a genuine Swedish countryside. Of course, to those fans thoroughly familiar with Mankell's work, it is the Swedish televised version that is found to be a more accurately portrayal of Mankell's novels...not the British, sensationalized version. And there's a reason for that.

Henning's prose is straightforward, organized, written mostly in linear fashion, a straightforward contract with the reader. It is largely quantified as police procedural work. The work of men who are dogged and patient to a fault. Kurt Wallander, the hero in Mankell's novels, is the alter ego of his creator: a lonely man, a dogged policeman, a flawed hero, out of shape, suffering from headaches and diabetes, and possessing a scarred soul. Understandably so and if some of the GR reviews are an indication; like his famous father-in-law Ingmar Bergman, Mankell is from a country noted for its Nordic gloom. But before you make the assumption that this is yet another addition to the somberness and darkness that characterizes Nordic writing Mankell often confounds this cliche with guarded optimism and passages crammed with humanity (for Mankell, this is true both personally and professionally as a writer).

As Americans we often think of Sweden as possessing an very open attitude towards sex and that this is in marked contrast (or perhaps reprieve) to the somber attitudes of its populace. But this is a view that often confounds Swedish people. The idea of Nordic carnality is notably absent in Mankell's work, as much a statement of its erroneous perception (Swedes do not see themselves as part of any sexual revolution at all) and in the case of Mankell ironic because the film director most responsible for advancing these explicit sexual parameters (for his time) was his own father-in-law the great Ingmar Bergman. In a world where Bergman moves in a universe where characters are dark, violent, extreme and aggressive - take note that the ultimate root of this bloody death and ennui lies in the Norse and Icelandic Viking sagas of Scandinavian history - that dark, somber view ascribed to both Mankell and Bergman's work was often a topic of intense jovial interest between these two artists.

For any reader of Nordic crime fiction, Henning Mankell is an immensely popular and staple read.

Enjoy!

Tea Jovanovi? says

Sjajan švedski autor, najpre ga je objavljivala Narodna knjiga a sada ?arobna knjiga... Da ne govorimo o Kenetu Brani koji je presonalizovao britansku verziju serijala o inspektoru Valanderu... :) Za ljubitelje dobrih krimi?a... I da malo upoznate i Švedsku... :)

K.D. Absolutely says

One of those books that I thought I would not like but ended up really liking.

I am not really a big fan of mystery *whodunnit* books but this one really hooked me from start to finish. The plot is not really focused on who the killer is but on the main protagonist and his life: aging, just divorced, daughter's not communicating to him, father's getting senile, getting fat, postponing his diet, drinking and driving and all of the other matters that make him human and vulnerable. Of course, you'd like to find out who the killer is but that's was secondary to me. I think this is also the first book (1001 or not) that I've read with Sweden as the setting and I found it interesting because I have not been there. Prior to this book, the images of Sweden in my mind were either those beautiful Ms. Universe contestants, milk products with cows and young smiling girls holding a glass of milk on their covers. Funny but that was Sweden in my mind.

Why did I think that I would not like this? Oh, Robert Langdon. I got tired of him. But **Kurt Wallander** is different. His being an inspector (a detective) is just about any job in the office. As I read this in the past 5 working days, I could not help relate what he goes through to what I am going through in the office. There are times that even if I put everything I have (full attention, extended working hours, extensive research), there are just some things that would not work and at the time when everything looks hopeless, comes a spark of inspiration or a word, a phrase uttered by someone (in my case, my boss) that made me think: *right, why did I not think of doing it that way?* In Wallander's case, it was that (view spoiler)

Except for Inferno (to-be-read), I read all Dan Brown books and Robert Langdon was okay in The Da Vinci Code (2 stars) and fascinating in Angels & Demons (3 stars) but ridiculously irritating in The Lost Symbol (1 star). He is alike rah-rah detective always running around going from one building to another and chasing killers. I just got tired of him. Here, Inspector Kurt Wallander is like you and me. He drives a car sometimes even drunk as he is missing his wife but dreams of other sexy babes. Hehe. Why, we men all do that, right? We love our wives but still have hots for pretty ladies we meet. I mean, Wallander is all too human for you not to relate to him. In the end when I repeatedly says to his dying friend, "*I made too many mistakes*" I would like to go to the book and hug him as I want to say: "Me too."

Easy read. Straightforward narration. Big font. No big words. All loose ends tied up tight in the end. Everything plausible. Human characters. No caricaturists. Not pretentious at all. Not trying hard to impress. Just plain wonderful storytelling.

First in the series and I will surely be watching out for the rest.

notgettingenough says

Ugh.

Maybe this book is dreadfully translated...or maybe it's like Ikea furniture. Mostly you end up with a bunch of bits that don't make sense. It's a popular theory in Australia that Ikea furniture is some sort of revenge upon people who live in sunlight. Maybe Henning Mankell is a plot to get the people who escaped the Ikea trap.

We all over here prefer more Abba and less bad furniture and miserable books please.

Eve says

An avid fan of police procedural books and television shows, it was not shocking that I fell in love with BBC's *Wallander* series, starring Kenneth Branagh. Like the *Inspector Lynley* series, the hauntingly peaceful country settings play as key a role as do the main characters.

In a lonely Swedish farming community, an elderly couple are bludgeoned to death in their home early one January morning. Wallander, acting as temporary head of the department while his superior is on vacation, is thoroughly unprepared for the violent magnitude of the crime, or the implications that a foreigner could have committed the crime. Sweden's open door policy to immigrants and political asylum seekers already being a hot topic among its citizens, this situation throws Wallander's unit into the media limelight. The pressure to catch the culprit(s) is even greater when the department receives threats of remonstrance targeted at refugee camps in the area.

Kurt's personal life is a shambles. Recently separated from his wife, estranged from his only daughter, and coping with his father's declining health, it's no wonder he turns to drink. One thing I thoroughly love about the show is that you can so clearly see what a sensitive, artfully inclined soul Wallander is. This makes his approach to solving crime different, but his vocation is also clearly ebbing away at his insides. This particular passage stands out in my mind when I envision him struggling to stay afloat amidst the madness:

"Before he went to sleep, he lay in bed for a while in the darkness of his apartment with his eyes open. Again he thought about the violence. The new era, which demanded a different kind of policeman. We're living in an age of the noose, he thought. Fear will be on the rise."

This was a good read, but I was really disappointed with the translation and poor editing. I love the *Vintage* imprint. They publish great quality books, especially their international division, but this was a dud, in my opinion, which sucks because it takes away from the author's image. I'm hoping the next one will be better.

Kemper says

During one of my periodic efforts to prove to myself that I'm not one of The Great Unwashed, I watched PBS's Masterpiece Mystery series featuring the Swedish detective Kurt Wallander as played by Kenneth Branagh. (Yes, it had English actors playing Swedes and was filmed in Sweden. Just go with it.) I liked it quite a bit and since I also loved the *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, I decided to read some more about these murderous Swedes. And now I'm really hooked.

Written in 1990, this book introduced Wallander as a police detective in a backwater town in Sweden. When an elderly couple are brutally assaulted and murdered in their rural home in an apparently motiveless crime, the initial clues make some citizens think that someone in the flood of immigrants seeking asylum following the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe is responsible. A wave of anti-immigrant violence and hysteria is on the verge of being unleashed.

Wallander is having enough trouble dealing with his messy personal life. His marriage has just failed, his emotionally troubled teenage daughter flits in and out of his life, and his estranged father is showing signs of dementia. The strain of balancing his increasingly unmanageable personal life and his police work are starting to take a serious toll on him. In addition, he's constantly worried about the new wave of crime and violence he's noticed rising in Sweden.

Wallander is a great sort of every-man detective. Not brilliant in a Sherlock Holmes or Columbo kind of way, and definitely not built for leaping into action against the bad guys, Wallander just comes in and attacks the tasks he thinks he needs to complete to solve the crime and get his life under control. Even though he doesn't manage to get through the list most days and experiences numerous setbacks, he just starts over again the next morning even if doesn't really feel like trying. Despite his frustrations with his own shortcomings and the government bureaucracy, Wallander manages to make progress with his steady two-steps-forward/ one-step-back method.

Good writing with an intriguing crime and a very relateable main character made this an interesting read. I'll be checking out more of the Wallander books.

Rachel Hall says

Faceless Killers marked the debut appearance of the dyspeptic Ystad detective, Kurt Wallander, and although the Swedish language version was written in 1991, the English translation did not follow until 1997. Given that my previous meeting with Wallander came in the form of the final novella of the series, I am struck by how much more gloomy and self-pitying the character seems to be in this first case, noticeably disposed to wallowing. From his early days as a new recruit in Malmö through to twenty-years later and now in a more remote area and smaller city, Wallander is in a prime position to observe the changing patterns of crime over the years, both their nature and their prevalence. At forty-two-years old he shouldn't feel as apathetic as he does, but with a separation from his wife, sporadic contact and relations with his daughter, Linda, and with a father characterised by erratic mood changes and almost impossible expectations, he doesn't have much to smile about. Lonely, living on junk food and blighted by lack of sleep, Wallander's family dilemmas seem to occupy as much of his focus as the brutal double murder of elderly Johannes and Maria Lövgrens in Lunnarp, a "village where life flows along the creek without vigour or intent". A double murder and an ensuing manhunt which soon triggers another murder...

January 7, 1990 in the county of Skåne with snow yet to fall, there is something far more chilling awaiting Wallander at the isolated farmhouse in Lunnarp he is sent to. What greets him is a bloodbath; a scene of such brutal violence that he cannot remember being so appalled previously in his entire career. With retired farmer Johannes already dead and his wife, Maria, left in a noose and clinging to life, Wallander struggles to comprehend just what can have brought such an act to bear on the remote farmhouse. Neither wealthy or known to keep valuables, surely the brutality speaks of a act of revenge and hatred? Rushing Maria to hospital, a bedside vigil is instituted in the hope that as the only witness she can provide a potential clue to the identity of her attackers. As she draws her final breath she repeats the word "foreign" on several occasions and opens a can of worms that threaten peace and stability across Sweden. When this detail anonymously finds its way into the public domain, the rebuttal from the police is not enough to stop a series of attacks swiftly being launched at the growing number of camps which hold the illegal immigrant influx. As Wallander himself receives several phone calls threatening retribution and events climax with a immigrant being shot dead, the police come under fire from all angles, all distracting them from the atrocity which unleashed the furore. When Johannes Lövgren is revealed to be a richer man with a much more

complicated past than previously foreseen, the police are powerless too subvert a wave of nationalistic sentiment sweeping the country.

For all that this novel does include it is a little lacking in pace and the actual investigation seems more like a vehicle for Mankell to make wider statements on society through the character of Kurt Wallander. The distinct benefit of this is just how realistic the investigation feels as it stalls to eventual deadlock and grinds to a halt on several occasions before a series of seemingly innocuous details picked up through the course of the investigation deliver an eventual resolution over six-months later. Mankell links these fortuitous discoveries together over the course of the novel and the eventual solution delivers the same satisfaction as found in *Roseanna* by Sjöwall and Wahlöö

Faceless Killers is not just about introducing the character of Wallander, it is just as much focused on making wider statements about the changes becoming noticeable in the Sweden of the early 1990's; significantly the increasing trend towards a country marked by less of a contrast between city and rural areas in terms of the crime experience and reflecting how the effects of open borders have increased the prevalence of organised crime. Now seen as a seminal series and something of a prototype for the genre it is easy to be critical in hindsight but in comparison to some of the more recent novels of the genre, I did feel this novel lacked a little subtlety. Mankell seems to feel the need to point out the tranquility of the village that the murder take place in, whereas now the social commentary is less signposted, more a drip-feed trickling into a readers subconscious and altogether less heavy-handed.

When the Immigration Services minister appears on national TV arguing that the police have a lack of interest in ensuring the safety of immigrants it is easy to see how the media angle can be skewed to stir up fractious tempers and cause further unrest. It was admirable to see that throughout the course of this investigation both Wallander and his colleagues used the situation to study the effects of immigration on Sweden and the prevailing attitudes, pondering more widely on the debate leading Wallander to conclude that the Immigration Services, the government and the media all have something to answer for as events spiral out of control.

For all his distractions throughout the case, Wallander is a tenacious detective and a policeman to the very core. He shows an admirable willingness to undertake surveillance operations which budgets are unlikely to permit and to go the extra mile for the eventual solution. Frustrations are never very far from the surface and Wallander is full of self-reproach, lambasting himself for what he sees as mistakes along the way. A man of firm beliefs, he decries the erosion of law and order and just how his job has changed from simply protecting people and their property to attempting to moderate the increasing level of fear which pervades through society. On the basis of this first case, Wallander would have even needed to lighten up for me to stay with him! Morose and maudlin investigators with a wry cynicism are all well and good, but the bleakness of Wallander in this affair was pretty unremitting. Wallander is brilliantly flawed, prone to rushing in and making hasty decisions and seeing things through telling slightly more rose-tinted spectacles vista vis his distant wife. For instance, does he really miss Mona as his wife or simply as a companion who ensured he ate properly and kept him 'in functioning order'? Given his erotic dreams and pursuit of the attractive deputy prosecuting attorney, Anette Brolin, it seems more likely that he was wilfully blind to his own emotions and delaying facing the truth. Interestingly Wallander does concede that the fragmentation of his family is something he could have halted, growing apart from his wife and losing connection with his daughter at fifteen when the marriage was floundering.

Thankfully, the ending of *Faceless Killers* nicely coincides with an uptick in the fortunes of Wallander with an improvement in familial relations, a potential romance and a pay rise amounting to 39 kroner per month! Sadly as Wallander himself recognises, a new era has dawned which demands a different kind of policeman

and that old world will never return. The question is can Wallander adapt?

Brad says

I remember a discussion I had years ago with a friend of mine about Jonathon Demme's film version of The Silence of the Lambs. We were both annoyed by the pacing of the film and joked that it was really the story of an FBI agent driving her car, with some dialogue thrown in to liven things up.

I felt a bit that way reading Faceless Killers, the first Wallander book by Henning Mankell. I don't know if it was only this first Wallander mystery (it's the first I've read too) or if it is a common theme in Mankell's work, but the writing is obsessed with time. Time of day, seasons, days of the week, months, we are constantly being reminded *when we are* in the story. But that's not such a bad thing.

What Mankell achieves with his use of time, whether he meant to or not, is an expression of what I imagine is the reality of police work: waiting, waiting and more waiting.

We are so used to the slick, Hollywood version of crime stories that we expect everything to come together quickly, cleanly, logically. We expect the perpetrators to make big mistakes, the crime scene investigators to find some smoking DNA, the Detectives to put all the pieces together as if by magic. That's not how it really happens, though, and investigations take time. It makes for some boring bits in the book, but boring in a way that reflects the police lifestyle.

As for the main character, Wallander spends more time in Faceless Killers worrying about his ailing father, obsessing over his failed marriage, and feeling generally sorry for himself than he does thinking about the case. Yet he still manages to work on the case with the tenacity of a bedbug, and six months after the killings, with nothing but perseverance, he gets the break in the case he needs and finds the killers.

Faceless Killers isn't a classic "whodunnit" style mystery; there's no way for a reader to figure out who the killers are. There are no clues we can follow, no hints, but there are no real red herrings either because, in the end, the murders and police work are not what the book is about. It is about the life of Kurt Wallander and everything else, including the mystery, is just a part of his life.

I like Wallander (probably because I watched the BBC version on Masterpiece Mystery and loved Kenneth Branagh as Wallander), so I'll probably read another couple of stories when I am bored. But if you don't like dreary, self-pitying, middle-aged, divorced men, the Wallander books probably aren't for you.

AC says

I ran across a reference to Mankell from someone on GR who said that crime-writing aficionados really like him.... but then, when I read some of the other GR reviews, I nearly tossed this one in the bucket. I'm glad I didn't! This is a first-rate -- a REALLY first-rate piece of genre writing.

It's 4.5 stars (maybe 4.75) -- and that because I'm getting more conservative in my old age... but its 4.5 from the five-side, not from the 4+ side...

Wallander is a tough, realistic, angst-ridden policeman living and working in small-town Sweden that's getting grittier by the decade... the characters are real, the plot rich and unexpected, the prose unadorned and transparent.

Complaints about the translation, which are widespread on Goodreads, are (imho) totally misplaced.

I realize that it's chic and easy to trash Scandi-crime books now, given the huge financial success of Tattnoo (which I haven't read) - but my advice is: if you like crime fiction, just trash all the GR cynicism and read this one.

Ah..., screw it...! just give it a five...

James Thane says

This is the first entry in Henning Mankell's series featuring Swedish detective Kurt Wallander. When we first meet him, Wallander has a boatload of personal problems: he is recently divorced; he's estranged from his daughter; he's drinking too much; he has a lousy diet, and his father is showing signs of senility.

Against the backdrop of this troubled personal life, Wallander is assigned to lead the investigation of the savage murder of an elderly farm couple. There is no apparent motive and there are virtually no clues, save for the last dying word of the murdered woman, which is "Foreign."

At the time of the killings, some Swedes are becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the large numbers of asylum-seekers and other immigrants who are making their way into the country. Fear and prejudice are on the rise, and although the police have absolutely no evidence to support such a conclusion, some anti-immigrant elements jump to the conclusion that foreigners were responsible for the killings. They want revenge and they seek to use the murders as an excuse to reverse the immigrant tide.

Mankell thus sets the stage for a clever police procedural set against the larger social issue of how welcoming Sweden--or any other country--should be to growing numbers of immigrants. Wallander is typical of the breed of plodding Scandinavian detectives who refuse to give up until they have deduced the solution to the case. At times, though, you find yourself wondering why he soldiers along in the face of the overwhelming personal problems in his life off-duty.

Mankell is a very good writer and I admire what he has done here. That said, I find the Kurt Wallander character to be a little too oppressed and a little too humorless for my taste. Like a lot of Scandinavian mysteries, this one takes place in the dead of a long, depressing winter, which only reinforces the generally depressing mood of the book as a whole. I enjoyed reading it, and I'm certainly willing to give the series another try, but I may need a jolt of someone like Lucas Davenport to cheer me up a bit first.

Lyn says

Dark, brooding and earthy – like a good Swedish crime mystery should be.

Writer Henning Mankell first published Faceless Killers in 1991 and an English edition, translated by Steven T. Murray, was published in 1997. Besides being a good book, this is notable as Mankell's introduction of his famous detective Kurt Wallander.

Set in the small city of Ystad, in the southern most tip of Sweden, and farther removed from larger cities like Malmo or Stockholm, Mankell has given this mystery a sort of small town charm, distinguished from the tense and energetic crime novels in urban settings. No ulcer ridden, overworked police chief barking orders here, or lengthy descriptions of cityscapes; the author has created an ominous, heady atmosphere of fear and simmering outrage after a murder of an elderly couple in a bucolic farming village.

In Wallander, Mankell has crafted a complicated and darkly charismatic protagonist. With his drinking, poor eating habits, surly manner and clumsy way with close relationships he is almost an anti-hero.

Well told and with a close eye for detail, Faceless Killers also deals with such issues as racism, national identity, immigration policy and individual rights. Known for his social activism, Mankell uses the crime novel as a vehicle to reveal and discuss inequalities and societal problems.

Good book.

Mara says

“To grow old is to live in fear. The dread of something menacing that you felt when you were a child returns when you get old.”

The first episode of a sitcom is usually a bit clunky. The joke to exposition ratio is low, and you've got all these new people to meet. While **Henning Mankell's** ***Kurt Wallander*** series is by no stretch of the imagination a “situational comedy,” I tried to give its first volume the same benefit of the doubt.

When our depressed, middle-aged police detective/protagonist, Kurt, mentally mused over his wife's recent departure for the fourth time during my first 30 minutes of reading, I started to get worried. I didn't expect things to be peppy; Scandinavian crime writing isn't known for sunshine and rainbows. However, I didn't want Wallander's malaise to turn into my own.

I think Dan Schwent's comment, “*I liked it but it made me tired,*” is pretty dead-on. The mystery itself, a “grisly” double homicide of an elderly couple which may or may not be connected to the growing refugee camp populations in rural ***Ystad*** (and throughout Sweden), wasn't a thriller — and that's ok. Sometimes I like moody, misanthropic reflections on society and its decline. But, while I would probably hate reading about my perfect proxy, I had some trouble relating to woes of Wallander's world.

Side note: Between this book and Stieg Larsson's trilogy, is anyone else getting concerned about the Swedish social service system? I mean, I know we don't have a great thing going here in the U.S. of A. (see Dennis Lehane), but still...

Carolyn says

Although familiar with Swedish detective Kurt Wallender from the popular BBC series, this is the first of Henning Mankell's books that I have read. And what an excellent read it was. Mankell writes in a very spare, no-frills way to tell a story that is clear and absorbing.

Wallender is a man whose life is in a mess; his wife has left him, his daughter is estranged, his father is becoming senile and Wallender himself is lonely, drinking to much and eating badly. However he is always focused on the job and his best breakthroughs come from following his intuition and allowing his subconscious to muse over problems. The novel starts with a horrendous crime. An old farmer and his wife brutally tortured and left for dead on a freezing January night in the depths of the country. No one has seen anything and although the farmer's wife is found still just alive she manages to say only the word "foreign" before dying.

Wallender struggles to get a grip on this terrible crime and the clues are teased out one by one over a period of months with still no breakthrough. The dying woman's word "foreign" sparks a series of crimes against refugees highlighting the uneasiness felt by some Swedes over the openness of their borders and whether the Government is doing enough to screen immigrants to determine if they are genuine refugees, economic migrants or those escaping their own justice system.

All in all I thought this was an excellent police procedural, realistically showing the patience and determination often required to solve a major crime with few clues to go on. I enjoyed Henning's straightforward writing style and his empathy with his characters.

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Lynne King says

There's something about Swedish authors that both fascinates me and tugs at my heartstrings. Henning Mankell does indeed do that for me with his Inspector Kurt Wallander.

The air of suspense begins with the words:

"He has forgotten something, he knows that for sure when he wakes up. Something he dreamt during the night. Something he ought to remember. He tries to remember. But sleep is like a black hole. A well that reveals nothing of its contents."

And this same suspense kept me utterly enthralled through to the last page where I came face to face with a remarkable and yet unexpected dénouement.

We soon discover that a gruesome murder has taken place in a farm, with only a neighbouring farmhouse, outside the sleepy village of Lunnarp.

A seventy year old man wakes up at 4.45 am. He's surprised because normally he sleeps later but he knows there's something wrong. He cannot hear his friend and neighbour's horse whinnying. He investigates and discovers a "slaughter-house" next door.

When Inspector Wallander arrives at the crime scene and observes the atrocities committed on the elderly couple, Maria and Johannes Lövgren, he's determined come what may to find the murderers. He's convinced somehow that more than one person is involved.

There are two elements that intrigue him. Why was a noose hanging around Maria's neck and why would the horse have been fed in the stable? Johannes has regrettably been killed but Maria clings on to life for a while in the hospital. Prior to her death, she mentions an odd word. It is this word that is to be the clue in the who, what, when, where, why equation.

With dogged determination, following every conceivable avenue, deductive reasoning and going by his intuition, a frustrated Wallander continues in his investigation. There are many false leads and dead ends. Was it a robbery? Did the couple have money? Enemies? Wrong suspects are interviewed. The investigation is indeed frustrating for everyone involved and time-consuming, spreading over a six month period.

That's the outline but it's the simple and fascinating text and the attention to detail that I'm so taken with. There's the main plot but then the sub-plot showing the personal aspects of Wallander's life. I truly empathised with him. His wife Mona had left him three months ago and was in the process of divorcing him, his nineteen year old daughter Linda wants nothing more to do with him after a failed suicide attempt when she was fifteen. He is constantly arguing with his widowed father, a painter, who continuously paints more or less the same picture, may add a grouse or a tree to make it slightly different but still manages to sell them. He has been painting the same motif all his life in fact. He's becoming confused and Wallander feels that he shouldn't be left in the house, that's isolated, all on his own. He's also losing touch with his sister Kristina.

Wallander drinks too much, is overweight through eating too many pizzas and the like, since Mona left him,

loves his opera, especially Maria Callas and Traviata, is loyal to his colleagues at the Ystad police station, especially Rydberg who suffers badly from rheumatism and uses a cane; is constantly wondering how he can improve his lot and especially his relationships with his family. Works long hours, suffers from loneliness and seems to have a constantly bruised face from fights and the like and yet I loved his character so much.

His mantra was “a time to live and a time to die”. “He had adopted this incantation many years ago, when he was a young policeman, cruising the streets of Malmö, his home town. A drunk had pulled out a big butcher’s knife as he and his partner were trying to take him away..... Wallander was stabbed deep, right next to his heart. A few millimetres were all that saved him from an untimely death. He had been twenty-three then, suddenly profoundly aware of what it meant to be a policeman. The incantation was his way of fending off the memories.”

The Swedish elements also add to the drama, winds, darkness, snow, temperatures below freezing point... There was the backdrop of many refugee camps, with people looking for asylum. Violence was increasing.

There is definitely an air of gloom that pervades this book but I still love it:

“Overnight a storm moved in across Skåne. Kurt Wallander was sitting in his untidy flat as the winter wind tore at the roof tiles, drinking whisky and listening to a German recording of Aïda, when everything went dark and silent. He went over to the window and looked out into the darkness. The wind was howling, and somewhere an advertising sign was banging against a wall.”

There’s some light relief thrown in when Wallander meets the deputy public prosecutor, a married woman called Anette Brolin. His instincts tell him that he should not get involved with her and yet...

This is the first in the Kurt Wallander series. I don’t really like series too much as they tend, well in my opinion anyway, to become like a template. But yes I will read number 2!

All in all, a fantastic book and reading more about Henning Mankell, I see that he has had cancer since the beginning of this year and is currently having treatment. I wish him well and I’m quite sure that he’ll make a good recovery. Treatment has improved and advanced so much from what it was even ten years ago. New life-saving treatments are constantly being found...

Dan Schwent says

An elderly couple is robbed and brutally murdered and it’s up to police inspector Kurt Wallander to find the killer or killers. Can Kurt act on the meager information he has available and solve the case as his private life disintegrates around him?

On the heels of reading The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo and The Girl Who Played with Fire, I decided to branch out and try a couple more Swedish crime authors. Faceless Killers is the first such book to fall into my hands.

Faceless Killers isn’t a happy book, much as its title indicates. It’s bleaker than a visit to an insurance office, mostly due to poor Kurt Wallander and his life.

The mystery is an intriguing one and delves into the secret life of one of the victims. The mystery is not of the solveable variety but that's ultimately not that important. My main attractions to Faceless Killers were the glimpse into Swedish society and Kurt Wallander himself.

The fact that one of Wallander's clues is that the killer is a foreigner thrusts the reader into a world of refugees, racism, and red tape. There are false leads and I have to admit I wasn't sure what was going on in the investigation part of the time.

And that brings us to Kurt Wallander himself. He's no super-hero unless lonliness and not having anything go right in his personal life is a super power. He's getting older and fatter, his wife left him, his daughter is a stranger, his relationship with his father is strained, and all he has is his job. Instead of The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, what I was primarily reminded of when I read this was John Lutz's Alo Nudger series starring a similarly sad character.

Faceless Killers is a good police procedural story. It's pretty bleak and moves a little slowly for my tastes but is still a good read. I'll give it a 3, possibly upgrading to a 4 somewhere down the line.

LJ says

FACELESS KILLERS (Swedish Police Procedural)- G+

Henning Mankell – 1st in series

Vintage Crime/Black Lizard. English Translation, 2003 – Trade Paperback

Police Inspector Kurt Wallander is called to the scene of a particularly violent attack of an elderly couple on a small farm. The husband is dead but the wife, found with a noose around her neck, utters the word “foreign” before dying. Wallander becomes obsessed with solving the case before feelings against Sweden’s immigrants becomes violent.

*** Although the translation into English made the dialogue a bit awkward at times, it did not take away from my enjoyment of the story. Wallander is fully dimensional, very fallible-yet-determined, and surrounded by strong supporting characters. Although told in third person, the writing has a first person feel in the way you know what’s going on inside Wallander’s thoughts. There’s plenty of action and suspense, and even a red herring that leaves you feeling the frustration of Wallander trying to solve his case. It also introduced me to the problems in a country about which I hadn’t previously known. I recommend the book and know I’ll be looking for others by the author.
