

From Magic to Murder

Kritika Gogte

“He experienced one of those moments of simultaneous confusion and clarity that belong to the drunk and the desperate.”- Robert Galbraith, Ink Black Heart.

Written by J.K. Rowling under the alias Robert Galbraith, the Cormoran Strike series deftly delivers this balance between confusion and clarity aspired to by many a crime novelist. Each novel in the series carries forward the theme of slowly unravelling the perennially unfulfilled romantic feelings and haunting pasts of the two private detectives, woven through the threads of a complex case set in the fast-paced hustle and bustle of London - a stark contrast to Harry's world of wands and wizards. Despite the series having been adapted to television, the vivid imagery in the writing itself opens the floodgates of the reader's imagination, making the experience of turning the page pleasantly akin to pressing 'next' at the bottom right of a streaming platform screen.

'Ink Black Heart', the sixth and latest instalment of the crime fiction series released in August 2022, pulls the reader into a world of pretentious artists, anonymous gaming chatrooms and opinionated netizens. With cleverly written chatroom conversations, it's almost as if the pages melt away to reveal a gaming screen, sticking to what seems to be a new endeavour on Galbraith's part to stretch the seams of a book to include unexpected elements – as seen in the previous novel which dealt with a cold case and showcased pages full of horoscopic and Satanic sketches made by a manic police officer.

Keeping the essence of the series intact, the author plays around with a simultaneous plethora of cases in parallel progression to the main one; managing to confuse the reader by interspersing important details with seemingly mundane information - a rabbit many crime fiction authors have tried to pull out of the hat. While the previous books used paragraphs full of monologues or internal dialogues to achieve this effect, this book uses art theory and chatroom banter.

While confusion can sometimes overtake clarity, the slew of questions that crop up in the reader's mind are anticipated by juggling several probable answers. Having perfected the art of putting the readers in the minds of both the protagonists at the same time, Galbraith skilfully brings their emotions to a boil without letting them spill over the rim. The online characters are colourful and realistic, despite hiding behind the anonymity provided by the internet; and seem to remind the reader of at least one person they may have come across online in today's world of Twitter trolling and emphatic social justice rants. Despite the influx of names sometimes being an assault on the mind of the reader, it is perhaps meant to be reflective of the barrage of names and opinions that come attached to them on social media.

With topical references, grisly crimes and endearing character arcs; Galbraith has once again managed to tie the protagonists' personal and professional lives together to make a gripping thousand page read that keeps you on the edge of your seat and renders you completely incapable of putting the book down.

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