Killing the Shadows by Val McDermid

Stunning new psychological thriller from Britains most exciting crime writer, the award-winning Val McDermid...Val McDermid is a roaring Ferrari amid the crowded traffic on the crime-writing road Independent A killer is on the loose, blurring the line between fact and fiction. His prey -- the writers of crime novels who have turned psychological profilers into the heroes of the nineties. But this killer shatters all conventional wisdom, and for one woman, the desperate hunt to uncover his identity becomes a matter of life and death. Professor Fiona Cameron is an academic psychologist who uses computer technology to help police forces track serial offenders. She used to help the Met, but when they screwed up an investigation after ignoring her advice she vowed never to work for them again. Still smarting from the experience, shes working a case in Toledo when her lover, thriller writer Kit Martin, tells her a fellow crime novelist has been murdered. Its not her case, but Fiona cant help taking an interest. Which is just as well, because before too long the killer strikes again. And again. And Fiona finds herself caught in a race against time not only to save a life but to bring herself redemption, both personal and professional.

This is only the second novel I have read by Ms. Val McDermid, the first was, A Place Of Execution, and it left me as uneasy as I imagine the writer wished. Killing The Shadows, is again a wonderful book that should be read under highly lit conditions, with standby lights and perhaps a generator. This ladys work does not just get under the skin; her words burrow into the marrow of your bones, and when appropriate the geometric center of the brain. The picture of her on the jacket has her taking the measure of a potential reader, as if deciding whether they can handle her invasive writing.
This particular book contains events that many will find gruesome and seriously deviant to say the least. What is interesting is these passages are from the imagined work of other writers, so the initial impulse is not to credit her with the grisly scenes, rather a third party. The passages she uses are not gratuitous. They are integral to introducing the behavior of a serial killer, and a possible source for his demented inspiration. What
drives the killer is more complicated than that, or this book would not have Ms. McDermid's name upon it. These portions of the book are also a small part of the reading, and should not discourage anyone from enjoying this writer's craft.

The characters she creates are little short of brilliant. One of them is a PHD Candidate named Terry. If this character were based on a real female, she would be on many men's list of women to meet, and also a woman who would be more than a match for most. The author presents very bright, attractive, strong women without their needing to mimic the undesirable characteristics of their male counterparts. Terry is one of the best female characters I have read in some time.

A certain genre of writers are the targets of this book's killer, or are they? The best part of that query is that you will not know until the last pages of the book why everything took place as it did. One of the keys to a great thriller/mystery is how well the author sustains uncertainty and suspense. No author does this better that Ms. McDermid. She sets blind alleys, manipulates misdirection, and false conclusions brilliantly. No matter how many books you have read that required an answer to, Who..., you will find this lady's work on par with anyone's.

Unconditionally recommended.

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