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Mel Sherratt

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A man's body is found on a canal towpath. In his pocket, a magnetic letter in the shape of an E.

Days later, a second victim is found, this time with the letter V tucked into her clothing.

As the body count rises, the eerie, childlike clues point to a pattern that sends DS Allie Shenton and her colleagues into full alert.

The race is on. Allie and the team must work quickly to determine where the killer will strike next. The rules are simple but deadly—to catch the killer, they must follow the leader.

From the acclaimed author of *Taunting the Dead* comes a flesh-creeping tale of a child's game with a terrifying, grown-up twist. This is the second book in the DS Allie Shenton series but can be enjoyed as a stand-alone story.

Follow The Leader Details

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From Reader Review Follow The Leader for online ebook

Maxine (Booklover Catlady) says

Another great book from the pen of Mel Sheratt. The second in the DS Allie Shenton series (I have yet to read the first!), this book was very entertaining with some surprising and unique aspects to the plot.

I read crime more than any other genre, and those that don't read crime tend to think it's all the same, but it's not, one crime book from another can be as different as chalk and cheese, some can be as boring as popping your giant bowl of popcorn one kernel at a time, even if a serial killer is in the book.

I like the character portrayal both the good and the bad guys in this book, there is some depth to them, I could easily picture these characters in an ongoing TV crime drama, there were also easy to remember, I hate reading a book when there are so many characters you forget who is who and what they do.

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As the body count rises, the eerie, childlike clues point to a pattern that sends DS Allie Shenton and her colleagues into full alert.

The race is on. Allie and the team must work quickly to determine where the killer will strike next. The rules are simple but deadly—to catch the killer, they must follow the leader.

The plot is what makes this book great. It switches timelines from the younger years of the killer to the modern day, which gives us a strong background into why he/she is doing what they are (to some degree) or does it? Tricky bits in there.

It's not boring for a minute, it's got a strong steady and fast enough pace. I liked the way it delves into the impact of consequences, no matter how long term that actions can have on future events. It makes you think. The piecing together from the letters found on the body had me feel like I was playing hangman, trying to work out the final word.

It's not often I feel any sense of sadness or empathy for a serial killer but this one managed to stir that up in me at the fantastic ending to the book. Emotional moment for me reading the past/present blending there.

However I must say, I did not quite get the very last few pages involving DS Shenton in the last pages of the book. Mel, if you are reading this can you let me know the message that was meant to send?

A solid crime drama, pleasing to read, holds your interest and gives you enough space to try to solve the crime yourself. Nice one Mel, 4 stars from me.

Oh - one last thing, I had no idea this was book two in a series until I had finished it, which shows how well it reads also as a stand alone.

Thanks for my ARC copy of this novel from the author and publisher in exchange for a fair and honest review.

Rebecca Bradley says

Follow The Leader is released on 10th February and my copy is from NetGalley. I also have to disclose that I'm acknowledged at the end of the book as being one of Mel's early reader's so being a friend, I am a little biased. So what I'll do is tell you my thoughts and let you decide if it's your kind of book. Really, what I usually do!

Firstly, I will say I love the cover of this book and Mel is doing one of my Cover Questions for the blog, so you will find out a little bit more behind the book itself soon.

Follow The Leader starts straight in the action with the first murder and moves quickly through each subsequent murder. As readers we already know who is killing these people. We also get to know, from flashbacks, the reasoning behind the murders. So in here we have scenes with our victims and killer, the police procedural side and flashbacks sprinkled in. It's weaved together really well.

If you have read any of Mel's other books you will know that she writes what she likes to call 'grit lit' real people on housing estates. She gets them and understands them and there is a feel of that knowledge of people and that style here, but weaved in with the police procedural investigation.

DS Allie Shenton is down to earth and likable. Though she really should wear flatter heels for work!

When the final reveal of the magnetic letters comes, it's perfect. It just couldn't have been done any other way, yet I didn't see it coming.

What she does really well with this book is look at how our formative years influence who we are now and addresses bullying and the unhappiness it brings. A satisfying ending, but also an ending that leaves you wanting to read the next one...

Kerry says

I was very excited to have an advance kindle copy of this book (via Netgalley) and I would recommend it to anyone who enjoys fast paced crime fiction.

I first discovered Mel Sherratt's books last year when I heard about the Stoke-on-Trent Literary Festival. I had tickets for the Crime Fiction Discussion Panel and Mel was one of the writer's on that panel. I wanted to have read at least one book before I attended the event so I downloaded Taunting The Dead. This made me an instant Mel Sherratt fan! I have since read the Estate Series, Watching Over You and Secrets On The Estate. They are all more than worthy of five stars, in my opinion, and Follow The Leader has certainly been worth the wait.

In this book we meet with DS Allie Shenton again (the Detective Sergeant from Taunting The Dead) and we follow her through a new investigation which begins with the murder of a man out walking his dog along the canal, in Stoke-on-Trent. Immediately they are aware that this may not be a random attack as a coloured plastic magnetic letter is found on the victim. The reader knows of the killer from the beginning, but we join DS Shenton and her team in their attempt to figure out the clues the killer is leaving behind before anyone else dies.

This book can easily be enjoyed as a standalone novel, but if you have read *Taunting The Dead* you will find a few of the characters familiar and references to previous cases. We also learn more of Allie Shenton's Sister, Karen, who was raped, beaten and left for dead several years before, leaving her needing round the clock care. Her attacker was never caught, something Allie struggles to deal with on a daily basis. I was born in Stoke-on-Trent and have lived in Newcastle-under-Lyme for most of my life, so the fact that this book is set in Stoke is a plus for me. However, I really enjoy Mel Sherratt's style of writing, her character's and the twists and turns each book has to offer. If you haven't read a Mel Sherratt book before then you really should give this a go. I'm pretty sure once you read one you will have to read them all.

Sue says

I wish to thank the author ~ Mel Sherratt and her publishers, Thomas and Mercer at Net Galley for supplying me with the ARC copy of "Follow The Leader" in exchange for a honest review.

I have say that I read the first novel in the series, " *Taunting The Dead*", which I enjoyed very much. I can now say that "Follow The Leader", the 2nd in the DS Allie Shenton series is another exceptional book from a very talented author. But it can be read as a standalone.

It is very clear from the first few pages of this book, that the book is about bullying and we are introduced to the killer very early on. Normally I do not like to know who the killer is right at the beginning, but I recognize that this allows the author to write in the killer's POV, and can reveal his thought processes. It is written from various different time frames in the third person from the murderer's point of view and the detectives. There are enough twists and turns to keep the reader guessing all along. There are flashbacks in time from when the victims were young.

This wasn't a whodunnit mystery or a psychological thriller. Instead, it was a police procedural story, following a series of murders and the search for the killer. The reader learns about the motivation behind the killings. A story of Revenge.

The short chapter format briskly moves the story along, and the characters are well-written, engaging and very real.

This is a wonderful thriller and made me realize, It can be a cruel world!

sue says

I just have to give this top marks, why?

Because:

1. I got into the story right away and wasn't distracted

2. It kept its pace throughout
3. Easy to follow
4. No matter that we learnt the culprit at first few chapters it held its magical powers of keeping from getting bored.

Let me explain my first reason [1] There is nothing better for me than picking up a book and reading the first couple of chapters and me 'getting it' and a feeling that "oh this is gonna be a good 'un" and not wanting to put it down.

[2] It was a nice steady pace, as you would think the DI/Police/Investigations would go. Its REALISM.

[3] The author made it clear, clean cut through out, easy to follow the characters, easy to keep up with 'each' person in each chapter. Not at all confusing as some I have read in the past.

[4] Sometimes, its disappointing don't you think? when the author lets the "cat out of the bag" and you either guess or predict who the culprit is. WHO DONE IT!!! ah yes I know! then the book goes a different way for you because its predicted, your right, and then last page you are saying "well, I knew that was going to happen, or, I knew it was him/her"

Not so in this case, as I said, Mel Sherratt lets us know early on who it is, but it still keeps you on the edge of your seat.

The blurb tells you a bit about what the book is about, so I don't like to give too much more details out. Its not fair on the reader. I wouldn't like it.

I am a great fan of this author, I have yet to fit in a couple more of her books. But being a regular reviewer for a hobby that I have, its hard to fit everything in [as I am sure lots of reviewers know!!] I can't wait to catch up with some more of her books.

I saw this author from day one, a book buddy friend of mine read her book, she told me, and then from there we have regularly stalked her for each book that comes out.

I am so happy to say that I received this copy from Amazon Publishing on Net Galley who kindly allows me free selection

Thank you Mel for a great read! Looking forward to more.

Liz Barnsley says

I adored the first Allie Shenton novel – Taunting the Dead- so I was very happy when Mel Sherratt decided to revisit the character in “Follow the Leader” and what we have is a fast paced, intuitive and realistic police drama featuring a terrific main protagonist.

Follow the Leader is not a whodunnit, it is a whydunnit which often is much more interesting and certainly was so here. Dealing with themes of bullying and peer pressure, Mel Sherratt explores the extremes to which

such behaviour can affect a life, creating a character who has been pushed over the edge. As Allie and co try to track a killer, we get to see his processes and thoughts, find out about his background and his motivations – this makes for some exciting reading and gives the whole thing a highly addictive quality.

Offset against that, Allie Shenton herself is given a lot more depth, we get a much deeper insight into her personality and background. She has issues – these were given a voice in “Taunting the Dead” but now we have a chance to really dig a lot deeper and find out more about her – she doesn't always make great choices as we discovered in Book One but the reasoning and emotional resonance behind how she is is terrifically well drawn here.

Mel Sherratt has a brilliantly readable writing style, a very definite ability to create characters you care about and give them true psychological depth, whilst at the same time constructing an intelligent and well imagined situation to put them in – constructively speaking this is excellent and will keep you turning those pages to find out what will happen.

I loved this and I am so happy that Allie will be back again – definitely comes highly recommended from me.

Elaine says

A serial killer on the loose in Stoke on Trent? Doesn't sound very likely does it, but what we have here is an extremely readable thrilling and sinister police procedural set in the Potteries. When a man is found stabbed to death on the canal towpath, with a second murder taking place a couple of days later and with each body being found with plastic magnetic letters placed on them, DS Allie Shenton and her team are baffled. The letters obviously connect the bodies, but what else connects them? And, is this only the start of the killings?

There are quite a lot of characters to follow in this book, which flits from perspective to perspective and also from present day to the 1980s. We see the story from the side of the killer and through the 1980s flashbacks we build up a picture of why he is doing what he is. Right from the start we know who he is and so we are always asking ourselves who the next victim will be and can he be stopped?

I did get a little confused with all the names a couple of times, especially as the 1980s sections all take place when a lot of the characters are children or teenagers and they all have nicknames which they have obviously grown out of in the present, and it is not until quite late in the book that you really match up every single nickname to every adult. Having said that, it is all part of the puzzle of the read.

The author really connects all the pieces of the puzzle together in a very clever way, one which made me want to carry the kindle around with me to read on, and which had me trying to work out how they were going to catch the killer and, more importantly, was there a link to Allie herself through her sister Karen? It is fast paced and chilling and really sent a shiver up my spine a few times when I thought of why the killer was doing all of this.

Now it has to be said that the book does end on a cliffhanger, one which had me howling “NO!!!, Not like this!!” and now I really want to know what happens next. If you don't want that frustration hanging over you, then I would say wait until the next book is out before you read this one, but either way, it is really not one to be missed. Many thanks to the publishers for the review copy.

Elaine says

5 Nail Biting Stars

To catch the killer you must follow the leader

*This old man, he plays one
He plays knick knack on my thumb
With a knick knack paddy wack
Give a dog a bone
This old man comes rolling home*

From the first few pages, this story was both exciting and had a sinister feel to it.

When **DS Allie Shenton** is called out to a murder of a local man, stabbed to death by a canal and then a few days later a women is also found murdered. Allie and her team have a race against time to find out first, what the connection is to these murders and to try and find the killer before he strikes again.

Her only clue.....they are linked is a plastic letter left at the scene.

The story is told with flashbacks which make us understand who's and why's and makes it all the more interesting and exciting.

As Allie tries to put the pieces together, time is slowly running out for the next victims.

(view spoiler)

So now onto my thoughts.....

Yes, exciting, addictive and kept me engrossed till the last page.

This is a very well written thriller from **Mel Sherratt** and the third book that I've read by her. It is part of a series, the first one being... **Taunting The Dead** and I was slightly worried about starting book 2 first but I was assured that book 2 could be read as a standalone.

I enjoyed the fact that there is another sinister side story that is slowly bubbling and I'm sure it will come to a head in book 3 **Only The Brave** and I can't wait to get stuck in again.

Jean says

“Follow the leader” is a comment that the killer makes in his mind to D.S. Allie Shenton: “...to catch a killer, you must follow the leader.” It also refers to the childhood game that the other children played in school. What is more haunting, however, is the way each chapter in which a murder occurs begins with a new verse from the children’s song, “This Old Man.” I Googled the meaning of these lyrics and besides the obvious counting of the victims, there are some other connections to the story as well. For instance, “knick knack Paddy whack” – I read that Paddy whack was a derogatory term for the Irish, and in America, it was sometimes sung as “Patty whack,” which, as we know, could be a nickname for Patrick, which is the name of our wretched, bullied schoolboy. “Whack” has a double meaning – to hit someone, and also “whacky,” or crazy – both intensely obvious in this book.

The killing begins with the stabbing death of a man on a canal path. A plastic magnetic letter E is found on his body. Days later, another body, this time with the letter V. It seems there is a serial killer on the loose. The reader knows who is doing the killing, and why, because we also see the killer in present day and in his memories of his school days. In his mind, he is invisible, and in essence, he is. Even when police and witnesses seem to make a connection to the victims knowing each other from school, nobody considers this boy who was picked on mercilessly. When he shows up to murder them, they don’t recognize him.

Unlike the first Allie Shenton book, *Taunting the Dead*, Allie does not go off on her own attempting to solve these crimes. She soldiers on as a team player, and we get to know a few of her fellow crime fighters a bit better. We see less of her husband, but as in the first book, he feels that her work causes her work too long and too hard, causing stress in their marriage.

Then there is Allie’s sister Karen, who remains in a nursing home unable to communicate or care for herself after a vicious rape years before. In *Follow the Leader*, another woman is brutally attacked and raped. Is it the alphabet killer? And is he the man who attacked Karen so many years before? Allie continues to feel guilty and also to grieve for the loss of her sister’s health and well being. She also wants the criminal caught and punished.

I felt that *Taunting the Dead* was okay, but I really enjoyed *Follow the Leader*. Ms. Sherratt did an excellent job creating Patrick, a person who was totally damaged by the constant abuse he suffered as a child. I did not feel sorry for the adult Patrick, the man who was not able to get beyond his horrible past, but I did understand him.

Patrick’s story is resolved, but we left hanging in another respect, which makes me want to read book three all the more. Bring it on, Mel Sherratt. Bring it on!

5 stars

Book Addict Shaun says

Mel Sherratt is now a must read author for me, and *Follow the Leader* is my favourite book of hers so far

(that I have read). The premise for the book actually sounds quite simple, but in the hands of Mel Sherratt it is anything but simple. Mel knows how to tell a story, and how to tell it in a way that has me gripped. As always I'm wary of how much to reveal, but it is hard to review a book without giving away *some* of the plot so don't say I didn't warn you.

A man's body is found on a canal towpath, and a magnetic letter E is found in his pocket. DS Allie Shenton, from *Taunting the Dead* is one of the officers on the case and they barely have time to breathe before another body is found, this time of a local glamour model, a letter V tucked into her clothing. Both victims are connected to the killer, Patrick, and that connection is made clear at the very start of the book. We often follow the killer in crime fiction, but it isn't often their motives are made that clear, so early on. The book lost none of its excitement or tension however, as Mel kept the twists coming until the very end of the book.

The book features flashbacks to the killer's schooldays, I attended an inner city comprehensive which wasn't exactly rough, but it had its moments so the scenes being described here were instantly recognisable to me, and made me remember those kids that were picked on for the way they looked, dressed or acted. Patrick has a clear motivation behind what he's doing and it's frightening to think that something from a person's schooldays can remain with them until adulthood, turning them into a killer. His upbringing did play a big part in things however, and despite the fact he was a killer there were still moments I felt for him and it was interesting to really get inside his head. The flashbacks certainly show Patrick's justification (or at least in his eyes) for carrying out the murders, some of these characters are still pretty horrible in the present day and whilst murder might be a tad extreme, those scenes were *brilliantly* written and at times graphic, just what I want from a book.

Allie is a character I am fast becoming a fan of, and I love that she's a strong character, still with various flaws and weaknesses but she's a character that stands out in this crowded genre. I'm rather bored of the single woman police officer, with the vodka in the freezer and the empty wine bottles overflowing in the recycling who has an unhealthy relationship with men and sex so it's quite refreshing to have a character like Allie. That's not to say her home life and relationship aren't without their problems, but they are problems I actually *want* to read about. Especially the continuing thread from *Taunting the Dead* concerning her sister who was attacked and left for dead years earlier, the attacker was never found but is still in the background taunting Allie. I had a theory about this, and thought it was going to be a twist in this book but sadly, I was wrong! What I will say though is that whilst this thread is interesting, approaching book three I would like some resolution rather than it being continually dragged out for ages, Peter James' Sandy anyone? So hopefully book three will see that resolved.

Another thing I love about this series is Mel's portrayal of Stoke, I don't know the city and have never visited but reading these books I feel like I *do* know the city, and it really came to life within this book's pages. You can tell Mel knows and loves the city, shining a light on its good parts but also its bad. I read a lot of London set crime fiction or US crime fiction so it's always nice to read a book not set in those areas. Also, all of her characters feel like actual people, which gives her books more of a sense of realism. This is fiction that you can easily picture being real life, a story on the news or even something that could happen on your own street which oddly, makes me enjoy the book even more. That realism and believable portrayal of the human mind really gets my own mind ticking over, and I do spend a little longer mulling over my thoughts after reading a Mel Sherratt book than I might with other books especially with this book's unexpected but brilliant ending. You can see the effort that has gone in, and having followed Mel on Twitter for a while now it's obvious she loves what she does and that shows on every page, yes every author loves writing but Mel was born to do it, and she does it better than most. The DS Allie Shenton series comes highly recommended by me, and I want book three *now* after that cliffhanger!

Sean Peters says

A Great sequel to Taunting The Dead.

A complete different story, but great to get to Know Allie Shenton and her team.

A man's body is found on a canal towpath. In his pocket, a magnetic letter in the shape of an E.

Days later, a second victim is found, this time with the letter V tucked into her clothing.

As the body count rises, the eerie, childlike clues point to a pattern that sends DS Allie Shenton and her colleagues into full alert.

The race is on. Allie and the team must work quickly to determine where the killer will strike next. The rules are simple but deadly—to catch the killer, they must follow the leader.

From the acclaimed author of Taunting the Dead comes a flesh-creeping tale of a child's game with a terrifying, grown-up twist. This is the second book in the DS Allie Shenton series but can be enjoyed as a stand-alone story.

Because we get to see the killer in action we also get to see his reasoning behind the murders. This makes it more intriguing because you wonder how long it will take for the police to catch up. In addition we see flashbacks in time which features both the killers and victims and the layers begin to unpeel.

In the chilling, tense fast paced thriller

Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

Christine says

I would like to thank Net Galley, Thomas & Mercer Publishing, and Ms. Mel Sherratt for an advanced copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

British grit-lit author Mel Sherratt has scored a winner with Follow the Leader, followup to Taunting the Dead and 2nd book in the DS Allie Shenton series. Much as I enjoyed Taunting, I loved Follow the Leader even more. There was a lot to like about this novel.

The story involves a serial killer and his rampage through the British town of Stoke-on-Trent. I was impressed with the way Ms. Sherratt had the reader actually sympathizing with this baddie. Even after all the murder and mayhem, I still felt a tiny bit of compassion for this guy. With superb character development and multiple chapters where the POV belonged to the killer, the reader gets a real inside look at why the killer is killing. He did not start out as a bad person; he was made a bad person. The thrust of the novel is what can happen to good people when they are treated badly by their families and/or bullies. As a corollary it also

deals with the basic human desire for love and security and what can happen to people when those wishes are denied. I loved that this was not just a cut-and-dried serial killer saga; there are real messages to be had in this book.

I do think Ms. Sherratt has a real gift for character development and the multiple POV technique. As a result, though there were a lot of characters in this book, I had no trouble distinguishing them. What I especially enjoyed was knowing the stories of all of the victims before they were done in.

While it took me a while to get into *Taunting the Dead*, Ms. Sherratt, at her grit-lit best, grabbed me at the very beginning of *Follow the Leader* and held me captive all the way through to the last paragraph. The writing is crisp and on point with no unnecessary descriptive passages or other filler. The pacing is perfect and never flags. Though we know who the killer is from the get-go, this knowledge does not lessen the intensity of the story. Twists and turns abound and continue, literally, to the very end. While the primary plot is tidied up very satisfactorily, there is a little bombshell in the last paragraph, letting us know what we are in for in book 3 of the series. I can't wait.

I do want to mention that there is a fair amount of profanity, but I thought it was used appropriately and realistically for the characters' personalities. She also throws in a liberal dose of British colloquialisms, which I found quite entertaining (I am a Minnesota, USA, girl).

Finally, it was good to see Detective Sergeant Allie Shenton maturing in her job. I also enjoyed the slices of her personal life.

What didn't I like? Uh...nothing. Well, maybe one thing. I will never again be able to hear the old nursery rhyme "This Old Man" without chills running up my spine. Shudder!!!

Just how much did I like this book? Well, immediately upon completion, I zipped over to Amazon and pre-ordered book 3 (*Only the Brave*), and then did something I have never done before—I one-clicked all the rest of Mel Sherratt's works right then and there.

I highly recommend *Follow the Leader* to all readers of thrillers and psychological suspense.

Petra says

2nd book in the DS Allie Shenton series set in Stoke-on-Trent in the UK. Enjoyed this more than the first, *Taunting the Dead*. Better character development. Fast-paced, easy-to-follow plot. Although the killer was known right from the start, the plot remained suspenseful and interesting. Glad I gave this series another chance after being disappointed with the first book. I'm warming up to Allie Shenton.

Janet says

Many thanks to the author, publisher and Netgalley for the advanced reader copy.

Follow The Leader is the second novel in the DS Allie Shenton series, the first being *Taunting The Dead*.

For me, this book was a better read.

Here the story is not so much a whodunnit, we know who does it, it's more the perpetrator's story and why he's turned into a cold blooded killer. Set in the city of Stoke it starts off with a murder of a man by a canal towpath, the only clue being left behind is a magnetic letter, which Shenton and her team find baffling. Cut to a couple of days later and we move onto the second murder of a former glamour model eeking out her last few moments before she becomes too mature for the world of modelling. Found by her husband with a second magnetic letter, the police are failing to see connections. As a reader we know exactly the whys and wherefores as the story is told in different timeframes, from the perpetrator's past and present and the victims' it's an interesting tale with a large cast of characters. Elements of the story were obvious, the potential word/s being spelt out as the bodies mounted up were easy to see, so much so I was growing frustrated myself wanting to give them clues!!

Shenton herself became more of a likeable character for me, her marriage, work commitments, family commitments all resonated well with a believable feel of a woman just trying to do her best for all around her. The characters were lively and fleshed out well with a very real throwback to the 80's conjuring some, um, interesting memories of school days gone by!! The tension and pace remains throughout and I read this one fairly quickly to the gut wrenching but ultimately sad end. It's one of those books that I felt some empathy for the perpetrator, life could have been very different had his younger days gone in a different direction. If only. Of course the secondary story of Shenton and her sister is still running and we have glimpses into that again, we're left with teasers as this one rolls on, so I HAVE to read the next one in the series to see how that continues. Such a cliffhanger!!

Overall the book is great. It's well written in a way that is synonymous with Ms Sherratt's no nonsense style, a style that says it like it is. I enjoyed this one a lot and don't hesitate in recommending.
