



Will Starling

Ian Weir

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From the acclaimed author of *Daniel O'Thunder* comes a rollicking, bawdy, and haunting novel about love and redemption, death and resurrection.

The great metropolis of London swaggers with Regency abandon as nineteen-year-old Will Starling returns from the Napoleonic Wars having spent five years assisting a military surgeon. Charming, brash, and damaged, Will is helping his mentor build a medical practice — and a life — in the rough Cripplegate area. To do so requires an alliance with the Doomsday Men: body snatchers that supply surgeons and anatomists with human cadavers.

After a grave robbing goes terribly awry and a prostitute is accused of murder, Will becomes convinced of an unholy conspiracy that traces its way back to Dionysus Atherton, the brightest of London's rising surgical stars. Wild rumours begin to spread of experiments upon the living and of uncanny sightings in London's dark streets.

Will's obsessive search for the truth twists through alleyways, brothels, and charnel houses, towards a shattering discovery — about Dionysus Atherton and about Will, himself.

Steeped in scientific lore, laced with dark humour, *Will Starling* is historical fiction like none other.

Will Starling Details

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Author : Ian Weir

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From Reader Review Will Starling for online ebook

Aoife says

Look book I tried. You sounded amazing and I so wanted to like you but whenever I was reading you I got confused by your random capitalization of words like Science, Hospital, Subject or even One. I kept asking myself why these words were capitalized because they weren't part of proper names and it wasn't done just to draw attention to it once. Every time these words appeared they were capitalized. Because of Reasons apparently.

Then I got annoyed by your constant phonetically spelled dialects that genuinely included 'Your Wery Umble Narrator' (capitalized of course) and that made it really hard for me to understand what was going on. It also made me wonder if the editor was sleeping when he came across the phrase 'when an irrevocable step was took' or if he had been so worn down from all the Random capitalization and Fonetik Aksents that he was already no use after just a few pages (where this phrase appeared).

Besides this book is a case of 'And wasn't the past a horrible place?' I mean I get it. For most parts of the past and in most times being poor/a minority sucked. But some books have the tendency to really rub this in. They basically stand there shouting 'Look at these horrible people! Look how horrible they are to others! Look at this poor person's horrible life! Look at how horrible this poor person is treated! Look at the shining beacon of morality that is our main character! He comes from a family of horrible people but for no discernible reason he has the sun shining out of his arse and treats everybody like a true gentleman! Look at how horrible everybody else is! Look somebody fucked a prostitute and then had horrible thoughts because he is horrible and the past was horrible!'

And this book does most of this and I am getting Wery Tired of Zis.

ARC received from NetGalley

The Bookend Family says

Let me bite the bullet and say it; I don't think that Frankenstein is a great book. However there is no doubting its importance or its cultural relevance. At the heart of the book lies an endlessly fascinating question; was Frankenstein's error in creating life, or in failing to take responsibility for the life he created? A similar dilemma can be found in Will Starling, a terrific new novel by Ian Weir.

Some novels take some time to find their rhythm, but I knew that this book was good from the first page. Mr. Wier grabs you by the lapels, with great style and a distinct and original prose. The first-person narration, by one Will Starling, is full of charm and unflagging energy, and I could have read this novel for that alone and been satisfied. There is however, a whole lot more to this novel than that.

Will has just come back from the Napoleonic wars to England, having become an assistant to the brilliant but poor Surgeon Alec Comrie. They are starting a practice in the slums of Cripplegate, and have some familiarity with the Doomsday Men; the body-snatchers who provide corpses for surgeons. They are also known the rich and equally brilliant Surgeon Dionysus Atherton.

The plot of this tale is rollicking yet layered, so I am loathe to tell you much more, but after a botched grave-robbery, and some mob justice, a grieving prostitute is accused of murder, and Will Starling, with one foot in

the street and one foot in the world of science and medicine, begins to see a conspiracy of diabolical cleverness that may involve Atherton, and may also just ensnare anyone who gets caught up in it.

Like the medical science of the time, the world portrayed by Mr. Weir is bloody and short. This is an historical novel that is full of sharp detail, but it's not about hoop skirts and fox hunts. There is a loaf of anger in this story and most of it is righteous and well-deserved. Most of the characters in *Will Starling* have the deck stacked against them, but they push on, with a perseverance and an elan that makes a grim book a pleasure to read. Not to say that things are all sunshine and roses; there is plenty of misery to go around. Unrequited love, injustice, poverty, betrayal, arrogance, hubris, it's all here in spades.

The bravery of common people, and the dignity of the downtrodden, and Mr. Weir's care for these characters makes it all work. Will, the narrator is the star, but all of the rest of the characters, no matter how small, are brought to life. Meg Nancarrow will haunt me for years. She's the kind of character that could carry her own book with ease.

When the story starts to race towards the end I got the feeling that I often get with the best of books; that the outcome is both surprising and inevitable, and that as much as I wanted to find out what happened, I dreaded the book coming to end. The question Ms. Shelley asked so many years ago is still relevant, and in *Will Starling* Mr. Weir shows that the answer may never be known; but posing that question, and doing it with daring and originality, is important enough.

Review by: Mark Palm

Full Reviews Available at: <http://www.thebookendfamily.weebly.com>

Lindsey says

I received an ARC of this book from Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review.

I have mixed feelings about this book. While I was reading, I was really interested to know what would happen next. But as soon as I would put it down, it was a struggle for me to pick it up again and keep reading. It was really slow at the beginning, and I was afraid I would have to mark it as "did not finish", which I always hate to do. Fortunately, it picked up a bit once I got into the story.

I did enjoy the author's writing style, however. It was very descriptive without being too flowery, and it flowed really well. He did an excellent job of describing London in the 1800's, and it was really easy to "see" the city and characters.

Will Starling is an orphan who, quite by accident, becomes an assistant to a surgeon. He suspects a rival surgeon of going a bit too far with his experimentation and is determined to prove it. Along the way he meets an assorted cast of characters, some of whom try to help him, while others do everything they can to thwart his attempts to learn the truth. *Will Starling* explores the dark underworld of medical study in the 1800's, and doesn't shy away from the dark and macabre details.

I think readers interested in resurrectionists, body snatchers, Doomsday Men, and anatomists will enjoy this novel.

Jennifer says

I received this book as a Goodreads' Giveaway.

Will Starling is a surgeon's assistant in London, England during the Regency era. As an orphan he found his way into the Napoleonic Wars assisting Dr. Cromie on sidelines in his amputations and other surgeries. Now that the war is over he is back in London, helping the surgeon and wandering the streets. He suspects that other local surgeons are resurrectionists (taking dead bodies and trying to bring them back to life) while others are working with Doomsday Men (body snatchers) in order to dissect human cadavers for research. He becomes obsessed with the concept that certain surgeons are trying to reanimate bodies and is determined to find them out and expose them.

Mr. Weir does an incredible job of portraying the Regency era from the language used to the details of daily life and the city itself. His main character is interesting and entertaining – narrating the story as though it is his personal journal. This is an interesting story that takes its readers into the dark underworld of medical history and explores the human condition. Well-written it is an incredible journey into the past.

Unfortunately for me, I found myself lost in all the details of characters, the city, and the “news” articles and lost interest in the plot about ¾ into the story. It was a winding tale that zigs zags through the alleys and gutters of gloomy, dangerous London.

Barbara ♥~Lindt Ninja~♥ (Careerist Gangster™) says

Will Starling is the titular narrator of this story of grave robbing, surgical experimentation and murder most foul set in London in the early 1800s. As the surgeon's assistant to Dr. Comrie, which isn't as lofty a title as it sounds, Starling makes it his business to be aware of the ongoing experimentation into the human body. After an unfortunate death, he becomes aware that one of the locals may be trying to resurrect the recently – and not so recently – deceased. Obsessed with finding the truth, young Starling follows the trail throughout grimy Regency London, into shabby theatres, grimy pubs, reeking alleyways, gaming halls and Newgate itself. Witnesses appear then die – or do they? The question becomes who is a reliable narrator.

I love how authentic the author's vision of the dirty end of Regency London was and the way he wove the depth of Will's trauma from his war service was masterful. There's often a dark humor to the tone of the story and language, made sly by the Random Capitalization and misspellings of words that occurs even more often after Will makes the romantic acquaintance of a dramatick young actress. I never knew “tossing the cat” meant throwing up! I have the beginnings of a new vocabulary after reading this.

Fans of nonfiction books about Human Curiosities and Surgical Explorations (capitalizations intended) of the era, Jack the Ripper-style thrillers and Frankenstein mythology would enjoy Will Starling. It's worth holding on past the slow start. For those who cry easily when reading, grab the tissues – for all its thrilling moments, there are plenty of tear-jerking ones too.

Review copy provided by publisher

Nigel says

In its way this really is a lovely book although there is nothing "lovely" about the subject matter. This is London in the 1800s with all the dirt showing in the tales here. There is an overarching story - of Will Starling, our Wery Umble Narrator and the trials of his life - however within that are some very good stories of individuals and times. Indeed the cast of this book contains some very rich characters indeed. Over all it concerns surgeons and Resurrection Men and seems well researched.

I found it highly entertaining with a dry and cutting wit; that amusement is rather basic in content at times but very funny. The language feels appropriate to the time containing archaic words at times and some it seems that were home made but quite easily understood. I found myself well involved in Will's world however, if I do have any reservations, it would be that I was maybe not gripped by the story even though I liked it a lot. The ending of this really did feel "right" for me. Those who like their history a little dirty and funny really should take the time to read and enjoy this, at times Gothic and ghostly, at times earthy and sharply funny. I'd certainly like to read another tale by Ian Weir.

Disclosure - I received an advance copy of this book from the publisher.

Monique says

“Once a man is truly dead and carried pale and cold across the Styx – once Old Bones has put an arm about his shoulders and walked him through the Gate into Darkness – might Science yet summon him back?” Will Starling became my new Gothic guilty pleasure this month. I found the dark tale of Resurrection Men and mad doctors particularly tantalizing, while historically fascinating. If you are seeking a horrifically fun book filled to the brim with grave robbers and reanimated corpses, look no further. However, if this topic doesn't totally captivate your interest, I doubt you'll survive nearly 500 pages of it.

Kris says

Here's a terrific read. To call it Charles Dickens meets "Frankenstein" may be partly accurate but hardly does justice to this dark-humoured romp. Engaging characters—foundlings, grave-robbers, resurrectionists, actors both great and dubious, brilliant surgeons and dunderheads—populate the streets, pubs, graveyards, hovels, and other outlandish locations of early nineteenth century London. A witty and well-crafted page turner with more than a few thought-provoking notions.

Colleen Hymers says

I actually had the privilege of hearing Mr. Weir read from Will Starling last August, and I couldn't wait to get my hands on this book! If you love language, and appreciate a rich narrative, I highly recommend Will Starling. I soaked in every word, not to mention the city of London which was a character all on its own. No

review I could give would do this book justice. I loved it. Plain and simple. A creepy story that kept me shuddering all throughout. And one that I finished (taking a page from the Wery Umble Narrator of course) with a "smile on my face."

Jessica says

If *Oliver Twist*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and *Frankenstein* had a baby, it would be Ian Weir's brilliant Victorian-esque novel, *Will Starling*. Recounting the title character's tale of being a surgeon's assistant in the gritty heart of early 1800s London, the novel bears a striking resemblance to the classic Victorian novel style in every way that a reader could possibly want. Filled with colourful, quirky characters; depictions of the Victorian underworld; and a very distinct tone similar to that of the earliest science fiction novels, Weir's story is one that Jane Austen would have fainted to behold, and that Charles Dickens, H.G. Wells, and Mary Shelley would have revered.

In *Will Starling*, Will is a foundling who finds a rather unconventional home in the company of Mr. Comrie, a war surgeon who can saw off and sew up a limb in two minutes flat. It is while in the company of Comrie that Will meets Weir's eclectic cast of characters: Jemmy Cheese, a wounded doomsday man who digs up the graves of London's recently deceased to provide surgeons and medical students with bodies to examine; Meg Nancarrow, a high-spirited prostitute and Cheese's lover; Annie Smollet, an actress with a flare for the dramatic and demons that follow her around; Flitty Deakins, a household maid with a nervous tick befitting her name and a subsequent love of laudanum; and the formidable Dionysus Atherton, a handsome, up-and-coming surgeon in London who charms all that he meets and may (or may not) be performing experiments in resurrection – a rather frowned upon pastime in any time period.

It is when Meg is accused of murdering Jemmy's brother that Will finds himself at the center of a conspiracy involving all of these characters and more – one that he is certain Dionysus Atherton is behind.

While the names themselves are Dickensian in nature, Weir does the great authors of the past proud by not shying away from the dark side of Victorian England. He chooses instead to wade in it throughout the novel, reminding audiences that the Victorian era was not all puffy dresses, fancy parties, and the charming antics of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. It was largely sustained upon prostitution, murder, and copious amounts of cheap gin. Filled with just as much mystery and death as romance and wit, *Will Starling* is a truly dark (and accurate) portrayal of London in 1816.

The accuracy of Weir's novel persists with the scientific tensions present within, perfectly reminiscent of the atmosphere that surrounded the practice of surgery and vivisection in the 1800s. Taking a page out of H.G. Wells' book (quite literally), the novel finds Dionysus Atherton with a stable full of "outlandish beasts" (pp. 94-95) on which he performs experiments – and, while it's no secret island, the results appear to be just as gruesome and grossly deformed. Is the Boggle-Eyed Man that Londoners report seeing wandering the streets really Atherton's very own version of Dr. Frankenstein's abandoned monster? Flitty Deakins, who is Atherton's maid and reports having seen the corpse brought back to life during a flash of lightning, certainly thinks so, but the truth is for readers to discover for themselves; this reviewer won't be giving any further spoilers.

Of course, the truth of the story, in general, is up in the air. With Will being an unreliable narrator, due to his personal feelings about Atherton, it's hard to say whether or not the seductive surgeon is really the cruel maniac that readers see depicted. Just the same, Deakins' laudanum addled brain, prone to hallucinations,

may not be the most reliable source for information on the goings-on of Atherton's household. Any public opinion of a surgeon during the 1800s is questionable, given the mass hatred for the profession. They weren't seen as doctors; surgeons were butchers who carved up bodies and damaged one's immortal soul post-mortem as a result. Thus, readers should approach the narrative with caution; everything may not be as it seems.

At its core, *Will Starling* is truly a love letter to the Victorian novel and the authors who penned them. It is exquisite in how well it mimics the great stories of the era, and Weir provides readers with a hefty tale that they can really sink their teeth into as a result. While he writes that "nothing stirred the blood quite like a hanging" (p. 16), I can firmly state that nothing will stir a reader's blood quite like this book. It is neo-Victorian literature at its finest, and this reader is eagerly awaiting *The Death and Life of Strother Purcell* – set for publication on September 4th, 2018 – to see what Weir does with the Victorian era next.

Sandy Carmichael says

very good story about 1800's medical practices, murder, London life and human nature.

Grazyna Nawrocka says

Brilliant and funny, the book is for me in some ways epitome of Englishness. The final chapters (after 17) not so good. It might serve as a good script for horror or suspension movie. Surprisingly I have not found anything scary in the story, but plenty of really hilarious concepts and conversations.

Laine Cunningham says

I was provided with an ARC by the publisher, and have been captivated ever since.

Will Starling is set in London in 1816, a city supercharged on the one hand by scientific advances yet hammered by the recently ended Napoleonic War. Will, an ex-soldier, moves in the seedy neighborhoods trying to make a living working for a surgeon and educating himself through his experiences and any book he can lay his hands on.

The story is one of a love that was lost because it was never truly given, the Doomsday Men who rob graves to feed the rapacious needs of the surgical colleges for cadavers, and a woman sacrificed to one surgeon's desire for fame.

You won't find much of the pretty parlors and ladies that populate so many other books. This takes readers into the filthy streets and derelict houses for an unflinching study of the realities most people lived at that time. The language is accurate to the times without becoming overwhelming for modern readers, and everything about the settings enhances the dark intentions of so many people...not the least of which reside in the heart of a surgeon who reaps other people's pain for his own gain.

Once you read *Will Starling*, you'll look for other books by Ian Weir. I certainly will.

If you enjoy stories with a darker edge, check out *Reparation: A Novel of Love, Devotion and Danger* and *Beloved: A Sensual Noir Thriller*.

Barb says

Will Starling tells an interesting tale, it begins as Dick Whycher stands "straddle-legged, one-eyed lad in hand braced on the lip of the merd-urinous Fleet Ditch" as he sighs with an audible aaaahhhh his pal Toby Fegen advises against pissing in the gutter on account of the tiny eel like creature with teeth a sailor told him about, "which would swim up a stream of them as pissed in the water and straight through the solitary eye of the breeches-adder, with consequences too shocking for any man to contemplate." Nearly a minute later Toby makes out a man on his back "half sunk in ooze. A little man in a weskit that had once been red, with spindly legs akimbo, eyes wide and staring blindly up at whoever was pissing down."

Dick convinces Toby to pull the victim from the slime and carry it to a door 'round the back of Guy's Hospital, where the porter will pay them four pounds for it. Inside the Death House surgeons dissect the cadavers, one surgeon "a man named Mr. Dionysus Atherton, whose deeds - both prodigious and unutterable- are at the heart of all that follows." And so Will Starling tells us how his life and Atherton's become entwined and how he comes to blame him for all the sick and twisted things that happen between that day and his last.

I loved the bawdy and gruesome descriptions of the corpses, the grave robbers and the tooth thieves. I appreciate the humor Weir threads into what is essentially a sad tale, there's quite a bit of the scatological with illustrations that amuse including those of a giant titty, Edmund Keen's pizzle as well as his puke.

As much as I loved Will Starling and enjoyed his slang and bawdy descriptions I was disappointed that his story's pacing lagged in the middle and again at the end. It's a good story but I think it'll be easy for readers to lose interest because the tension slacks and the focus seems to shift to the minutia rather than the inner conflicts that propel Will forward. There are a lot of characters and a lot of details that aren't vital to the story, both serve to bog it down. I also found one particular heartbreak and devastation Will suffers at the end of the book a bit melodramatic and somewhat out of character as it causes him to forget what a clever fugitive he is. I did, however, appreciate reading about the two deeper heartbreaks in his life.

I enjoyed this novel but would have been more satisfied if it had been pared down to a more suspenseful story-line. I'm glad I read it but I'm not sure if others will appreciate its wending wordiness. I have to add this is the second book in a row I've read that has included some "un-dead" characters and while I enjoyed this one far more than the last I would have appreciated a heads-up before I started reading. Perhaps a new system could be created where books with werewolves, vampires and zombies inside bear a symbol on the spine indicating which of each makes an appearance.

Thank you to the publisher SteerForth Press and the Amazon Vine program for making the advance reader copy available to me in exchange for an honest review.

Peter Darbyshire says

One of the best damned books I've read in years. This one has it all: the lyrical voice of a fallen angel,

murder and resurrection, more historical detail than you can shake a surgeon's bloody razor at! It pulls the spirit of Frankenstein from the grave and then dances madly around in your imagination with it. If you don't like this, you must be dead inside. Which means the grave robbers will be visiting you shortly.
