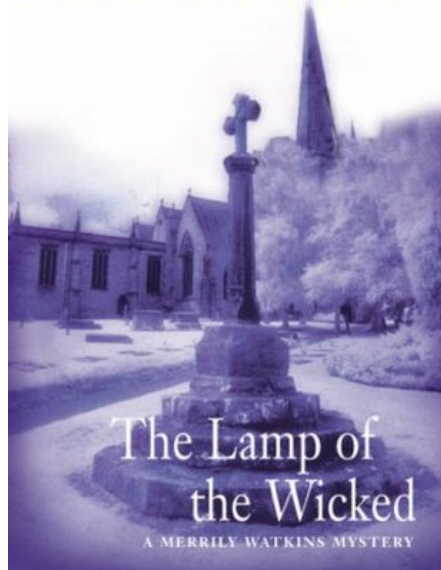


PHIL RICKMAN



The Lamp of the Wicked

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It appears that the unlovely village of Underhowle is home to a serial killer. But as the police hunt for the bodies of more young women, Rev. Merrily Watkins fears that the detective in charge has become blinkered by ambition. Meanwhile, Merrily has more personal problems, like the anonymous phone calls, the candles and incense left burning in her church, and the alleged angelic visitations.

The Lamp of the Wicked Details

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From Reader Review The Lamp of the Wicked for online ebook

Damaskcat says

Women are disappearing from the area and there is a cowboy drainage contractor around. When those two facts come together and a body is discovered under a newly installed drainage system the police think they have an open and shut case but things aren't as simple as they first seem to be.

The shadow of Fred West – one of England's most notorious murderers – still lies heavy over the Gloucester area and it seems as though once again his legend has been affecting people's actions. Diocesan Deliverance Consultant, Merrily Watkins, is involved because she discovered the body and DI Frannie Bliss wants her to talk to their suspect. She has her own problems as she has received an anonymous donation for the church which she is unsure about accepting.

A strange village which seem to be enjoying a revival, dubious booksellers and missing women some of who seem to have had dealings with some very dubious practices make this a compelling and frightening read. I think this is probably one of the best and most disturbing books in this well written series.

Debra says

These books are so well-written, I could hardly put them down. Well-fleshed characters, excellent dialogue, unusual themes, slightly supernatural, not at all preachy, great thought-provoking theology/spiritual discussions. I can't wait to read the next one!

Sarah says

I'm reading the series in the right order, and have enjoyed them up until this one, which is definitely not my favourite. I got bored in the middle and had to push myself to finish, then it got better and suddenly it was the end.

I think it was the subject matter that I found distasteful: I really cannot stomach horror stories and, although there weren't actually any horror parts in this novel, I felt uncomfortable with the numerous references to Fred and Rosie West. The writing was, however, very good, and I'm happy Lol has got a life at last, so I will carry on reading the series.

Donna says

This is number 5 in the series and the characters are developing and growing. A lot has happened in the village of Ledwardine and its environs in the year or so since Rev Merrily Watkins arrived! It's the sort of place you may not want to move to, a bit like Midsomer!! In fact this series could probably be made into a TV series, although I hope they would do it justice, and some of the grisly scenes may not be ideal for

daytime viewing!

This book centres on a serial killer - but is he really, or is he just someone with an illness caused by his environment? Did he actually kill anyone?

It all becomes clear right at the end of the book, and incidental characters who you may not really think much about, or wonder why they are there, come into their own at the end. They are all there for a reason it seems.

There is a bit of artistic license in the fact that the murders are linked to an infamous real life serial killer who was convicted at around the time this book was written, and I guess this adds to making the story itself seem a bit more believable.

I enjoyed his book once I sat down and got on with reading it, and I'm interested to see what Rev Watkins has to deal with next time!

Christia says

Rickman is one of my favorite authors, so much so that I will on occasion re-read his books. I chose to re-read this one to give it another chance. Although very good, this is not one of my favorites.

Rickman's stories are so multi-layered, sometimes it is difficult to summarize his books. This one deals primarily with the impact of the death of presumed criminal Roddy Lodge upon his hometown village of Underhowle. Because of his erratic behavior, Roddy is assumed responsible for the disappearance and death of several local women. To make matters worse, his neighbors believe he modeled his own crimes after the heinous acts of serial killer Fred West (who, I was very startled to learn, is not someone Rickman made up but was an actual real criminal, whose acts were so disturbing he makes Ted Bundy look like an angel in comparison).

Roddy is a business competitor of (my favorite character) Gomer Parry, who lives in the scenic village of Ledwardine, in the Hereford district near the border of England and Wales. Gomer accuses Roddy of setting fire to his garage where he stores his digging equipment and also holds him responsible for the subsequent death of Gomer's nephew and assistant Nev. During a confrontation with Roddy, Gomer and his friend, the Rev. Merrily Watkins, vicar of Ledwardine who also happens to be a "Deliverance Consultant" (exorcist) stumble across a crime even worse than arson. As they try to determine the origins of Roddy's crimes and the explanation for his death by his own hands, Merrily must also struggle with church politics in addition to her teenage daughter Jane, who is even more sullen here than usual and is experiencingd somewhat of an existentialist crisis. And then there is the member of the congregation who develops an infatuation with Merrily and decides to move to Ledwardine as a result of her vision of the angel Uriel.

In the meantime, Merrily's new boyfriend, musician Lol Robinson has a successful but reluctant comeback, thanks to the assistance of Prof and the mysterious Moira Cairns, 2 musicians (characters from earlier Rickman books who make a cameo appearance here).

As usual, Rickman borrows heavily from local folklore (and in this case, criminal history) and seems to target one "theme" in each of his books, presenting the reader with both a supernatural explanation alongside a more rational one. The mood he sets is almost palpable and his dialogue, as always, is extremely effective and realistic.

Not a quick read and one that requires some degree of concentration, but a good read nonetheless.

Rhode says

Congratulations to Phil Rickman for NOT using the obvious plot device in this novel. When I realized it was about a serial killer who targets women, I winced, mentally preparing myself for that scene you know is coming, when the killer has one of the lead female characters in a defenseless position and she has to get free. Every damn cop TV show - even the ones with 'strong' females - winds up putting its female leads in this situation. I didn't realize how fed up I am with it until it was not part of the plot here. Take that you uncreative TV writers!

This book is full of thrills, chills, unexpected twists, and some lovely character development. I am not British and so was not aware until the author's notes at the end that one of the main offstage characters was based on a real life serial killer in the UK from the 1990s. If I had known he was 'real', the book would have been even more dark and scary.

❀?RoryReads?❀ says

I'm giving this one two stars because of it's subject matter. I really had to push myself to finish it.

Maylin says

IMHO this is the best (and darkest) of the series so far.

This might have something to do with it's connections to the Fred West case which happened in the part of the country I lived in and which I cannot forget. It cleverly left many open questions which may well be speculation but leaves a sinister miasma over the whole thing and made me think about how a crime of that magnitude of evil can live in a place long after the perpetrators had departed. Rivetting.

Monica says

Phil Rickman books are always a delight to read, so I try to space them out. Liking the direction things are taking with Merrily and Lol, but of course this is just a small corner in the plot of the book. The plot has many layers, moving back and forth between the point of view of a view characters. Evil is once again present in a small village, murder, secrets kept. The tie-in with the Fred West case of the nineties makes it sometimes difficult to take in, true life evil isn't easy to fit into a work of fiction, but I think Rickman does a good job. Loving this series.

Sarahpeacock says

Phil Rickman is to the Herefordshire border country what Alan Garner is to Alderley Edge and Cheshire. His

writing is saturated with the feel of the landscape, tied up intimately with its old stories, it's folklore. That's why I love Rickman's writing so much. That, and his, at first glance, readable no nonsense style but on closer inspection like many great writers it's clever and quite beautiful. 'He was directly under the power lines - heavy gauge black strings on a fretboard of night cloud'. He says in the closing credits that it 'was not exactly an easy book to write' but I'm very glad that he did. It takes the characters of Merrily, Jane, Gomer, Lol and even Huw to some very dark places indeed and the subject matter provides plenty to think about: evil - formless and dark - human or supernatural? Rickman cleverly provides links to the Fred West cases and explores what it is that leads someone to be a predatory serial killer. The background plot of the electrical pollution and power lines is equally well handled and ties in nicely with themes relating to the changing face of the countryside. Some folk think it's a bit dark but that's exactly why I liked it. Pure genius!

Laura says

3.75 stars. I always enjoy this series, but this one was primarily about a mass murderer, so I can't say it gave me that creepy cozy feeling I look forward to with this series (although it definitely did in parts, before that storyline really got going. I highly recommend this series for ghost story lovers and people interested in the supernatural. Rickman bases some part of each story on reality, which always ramps up the creepy factor, and I loved the main characters from the first book. Also really enjoy the audio versions, which are available on Audible.

Kerry Hennigan says

This is probably the grimmest of Phil Rickman's Merrily Watkins mysteries. It has connections to a real life serial killer of horrific proportions, which makes this a dark, dark novel.

Adding to the darkness is the 'dark night of the soul' through which Merrily's teenage daughter Jane is currently living, her faith in anything and everything dispelled by depression and despair.

When a body is discovered in suspicious circumstances in a sewerage trench, suspicions are raised that there may be others hidden elsewhere in the region where the same contractor has been working. Merrily's old friend Gomer Parry is called in to dig for any evidence. But Gomer has his own tragedy to deal with, and Merrily feels powerless to help.

The message in "The Lamp of the Wicked" seems to be that evil, even if it turns out to be deliberately contrived, is still evil.

Young Jane, meantime, is just looking for some reason to believe there really is something to, well, believe in, beyond the darkness.

UP-DATE after a subsequent reading 17 Aug 2014

The Lamp of the Wicked is a ripping read – I enjoy it far more than its immediate predecessor in Phil Rickman's wonderful Merrily Watkins series, namely The Cure of Souls, which has confused me both times I've read it. (Yes, only twice, while I've read most books in the series many times).

Merrily's daughter Jane, one of my favourite characters in the series, experiences a very dark night of the soul while her mother becomes increasingly distracted by the events unraveling in Underhowle.

Lol Robinson, Huw Owen and DI Franny Bliss all have sufficient roles in this novel to satisfy their fans, as does Gomer Parry, who experiences some of the tragedy too close to home for him to be forgiving.

The great thing about this one is the twists in the final revelations... more than one twist, more than one revelation, so that Rickman continues to keep us – and Merrily guessing, and doesn't fail to take us by surprise.

Jamie Collins says

This is the darkest of this series yet. It's about the aftermath, or maybe you'd say fallout, of a real-life English serial killer of the 1990's, Fred West. It's a good book, notwithstanding some nonsense about people being allergic to electricity, but I'd have been content to go my whole life without knowing anything about West, serial killers not being one of my favorite topics to read about. Fictional ones are bad enough; this novel sometimes felt too much like a true crime book.

The paranormal aspects are weaker here than in the last book. There is little more than a sense of the lingering evil spirit of West possibly infecting/possessing people and places.

I continue to enjoy Rickman's writing and his characters. I like Merrily, although she seems to be rather ineffectual as a priest, as an exorcist and as a mother. She rarely takes action - things happen to her and around her and despite of her. Her simple physical presence and her quiet, determined goodwill seem to be enough to soothe and impress people.

I love the slow pacing of these stories, and I love the setting: small English towns close to the Welsh border which are making efforts to modernize and prosper that often clash with local traditions and sensibility.

Emma says

I'm amazed I can end up saying I liked this book because it was pretty dark and close to home, with its strong links to the Fred and Rosemary West killings. And there were so many subplots going on, it was all starting to feel like too much. But just as I was losing steam, the whole story came together again and redeemed itself.

Julia says

The Lamp of the Wicked is a tremendously dark, creepy book, but it is also one of the shortest long books I've ever read. Each entry in Phil Rickman's Merrily Watkins series is excellent, and recommended. If you're looking for an absorbing, well-written, intelligent series with strong, believable characters, try Phil Rickman.

