



Scared To Live

Stephen Booth

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How do you investigate the murder of a woman without a life? That is the challenge facing Cooper and Fry when a reclusive agoraphobic is found shot to death in her home. With no friends, no family, and virtually no contact with the outside world, the dead woman may simply have been the unlucky victim of a random homicide.

At virtually the same time, a raging house fire claims the lives of a young mother and two of her children. But as the debris is cleared, troubling questions remain in the ashes—among them, how did the blaze start, where was the husband at two a.m. the night of the fire, and was it really the flames that killed his family?

Now, as Cooper faces the reemergence of a dark secret he'd hoped to forget, and Fry copes with problems both personal and professional, a horrific possibility begins to take shape: What if the two investigations are somehow connected? A mysterious and unpredictable killer is on the loose. And his next victims could very well be the only two cops who can stop him.

Scared To Live Details

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From Reader Review Scared To Live for online ebook

Nikki says

Although I enjoyed this latest in the Cooper and Fry series, and will be awaiting the next quite eagerly, I found Scared to Live a bit disappointing. Perhaps it's because I figured out the Big Surprise at the end of the book several chapters in advance. The book deals with the murder of a mysterious, reclusive woman, to which Cooper is assigned, and also with the arson death of a woman and two children, which Fry investigates. Not surprisingly, the cases turn out to be related, and both have a connection with Bulgaria. Suspects proliferate and witnesses fail to tell the whole truth for reasons of their own. Issues that crop up in the cases under investigation also resonate strongly with Cooper's and Fry's own personal issues. Somehow it just didn't come together quite as well as Booth's previous books did for me. I hope he's not getting tired of the series.

Priya says

Originally posted here.

You can start reading the series with this book, but I really think you should first get to know the characters through the first book, Black Dog. Scared to Live is not really fast paced, but it is definitely thrilling. There are twists and turns and unexpected outcomes, but they are not all there is. The book is set in the fictional Peak District town of Edendale and are filled with picturesque descriptions of the countryside. It revolves around the lives of two Derbyshire detectives, Ben Cooper and Diane Fry. The reason I say lives is that the book does not feature a single investigation. There are multiple cases, multiple solutions and long glimpses into their personal lives, interactions and opinions. That is not to say that the author doesn't manage to neatly tie it all up together at the end. For me, Scared to Live and the other books in the series are almost genre-defying and rarely as riddled with stereotypes as most small town crime fiction (the "cozies" as they're called.) They feel complete.

In Scared to Live, Cooper takes on the carefully executed murder of a mysterious woman, Rose Shepherd, who seems to have no life or connection with the rest of the world, while Diane Fry struggles with the investigation of the fire, convinced that the husband started the house fire that killed his wife and daughters. However, neither case leads anywhere, until they find the thing that connects the two. The missing child of the victims of the house fire is discovered to be adopted and the family is supposed to have met the other victim, the loner, Rose Shepherd.

Ben Cooper is an altogether likable character. He is the one everyone's fond of, the son of a policeman, grown up on a farm and is pretty much the go-to guy when it comes to local information. He has 'instincts', few qualms about breaking rules when following his intuition, he empathizes with the victims and gets attached too easily. But for all his outgoing, warm helpfulness, he is kind of naive, which of course only makes him cuter. Diane Fry is the exact opposite. At first glance, I suppose she'd be an intimidating, stern person you'd hesitate to go up to. She is a city-girl stuck in the countryside, desperate to get out and reluctant to form any bonds. And she has a past that brought her to Edendale from Birmingham. Unlike Cooper, Diane has no family to speak of, having been in foster care, no friends and a very go-by-the-book attitude. You don't find her expressing any feelings other than a sort of derisive sarcasm, and you find it very difficult to sympathize with her. She also shares a history with Cooper that you'd want to read Black Dog to know.

It's the complex tension between Cooper and Fry that makes these novels as engaging as they are. They often misunderstand, disagree with and infuriate each other. And no, they don't end up together (haven't yet, anyway) nor do you want them to - most people end up hating Fry, although I kind of like her for being the gritty outsider that she is, not all characters can be perfect saints. In *Scared to Live*, though, we get to see a more human side of Fry, she has an almost crush, though not quite. She begins to care about the surviving daughter of the victims of the suspicious house fire, the girl who turns out to have a similar past as Fry herself. Ben Cooper's personal life features less in this book, we know he's dating a scenes-of-crime-officer Liz Petty. Although, I was considerably haunted by his brother Matt's worry that his daughter might have a genetic inclination to schizophrenia because of their Ben's and his mother.

The best thing about *Scared to Live* is the international turn it takes. Saying any more, in my opinion, would ruin the book for you. The story is intense and heart wrenching, the themes are intriguing and the ending is epic. Like every book I've read in this series, the final showdown left me chuckling with satisfaction. Read it.

Samantha says

The main problem I had with this book was the payoff. It was too far-fetched and stretched credulity. Normally, this would result in a one or two star rating, but I gave it three stars because I simply love DC Cooper.

The story starts out with two separate crimes: (1) a woman (Rose Shepherd) is found dead in her home, shot twice through her bedroom window by a sniper and (2) a mother (Lindsay Mullen) and her two children die in a house fire.

DC Cooper is investigating the first one, DS Fry the second one. Of course, Cooper feels empathy for the victim, as always. What's surprising is the fact the DS Fry seems to feel some for the fire victims as well, which rarely happens. She also feels for the surviving child, a young girl named Luanne, who turns out to be adopted. DS Fry, you see, grew up in foster care and can relate to being unwanted by her real parents. (Sob.)

The death Cooper is investigating, that of Rose Shepherd, is more complicated. The woman was a recluse and finding any clues at all about her life has proven difficult. All he has to go on are a very few eyewitness accounts of people who'd actually met her and the fact that she visited a nearby town, Matlock Bath, a few days before she was murdered.

Diane Fry spends 3/4 of the book convinced the husband torched his house and killed his own family, refusing to see any other option (as usual). Cooper, on the other hand, takes his time before coming to a conclusion. He's more patient and more willing to see the bigger picture than Fry.

As it turns out, the two crimes are related, albeit tangentially. This, however, is the weakness of the book. Turns out Rose Shepherd brokered the illegal adoption of baby Luanne, but that ultimately had nothing to do with why the Mullen family was killed. It really was just a coincidence. There was also a mentally ill brother, a Bulgarian police detective, and a subplot/red herring involving Bulgarian organized crime and baby smuggling. Like I said, far-fetched, esp. for a rural area of England, the Peak District.

What saved the book for me, ultimately, was the personal stuff. DC Cooper has a new girlfriend, Liz Petty, who is a Scenes of Crime Officer (think CSI), which makes me happier than what is healthy, I'm sure. I don't know why I should care, really, but I do. He's also forced by his brother, Matt, to confront the implications of

their mother's schizophrenia, which proves difficult for him.

Oh, and DS Fry? She's human after all, since she seems to develop a sort of crush on the Bulgarian police detective that comes to England to lend a hand on the Rose Shepherd case. It's doomed to fail, of course, but it at least shows she's not as cold-hearted as she likes everyone to think she is.

Good book, but Booth has written better.

Yves Lefevre says

Excellent plot. Interesting characters (although one of them is a bit of a caricature).

El says

I attended a very enjoyable talk by Stephen Booth and was inspired to read this book by his comments on writing a thriller. I inadvertently started with no 7 in the series and was quite disappointed. I don't know if it's because you need to read the series in order but I found this too long with extraneous detail that could have been removed with no loss to the enjoyment of the work. I also found the two main characters thinly sketched, not feeling that I knew them very well as people by the end of the book. The plot at times stretched credulity and I thought the ending was unbelievable, both the arson and the baby threads. The impression I had was that Mr Booth had lost interest at some point but had to finish the novel and so created his two dénouements.

On the positive side the actual plot was quite interesting and its various links were well delivered and the descriptions of the Derbyshire setting were a pleasure to read. I will look out an earlier book in this series to compare with this one. Recommended for Derbyshire folk!

Kathryn says

Diane Fry is a tough nut to crack, or, for me, even like much but, given her complicated history, she certainly earned my respect. Ben Cooper, more approachable but with his own issues, balances Diane in an odd way. There are more people with crazy baggage in this complicated and well written tale than you could shake a stick at but be careful at whom you shake that stick. Nope, I never saw that conclusion coming. # 7 in this series begs me to read the rest, and, simply to draw a smile from the niece, do it in order.

Colin Mitchell says

Typical of this series the first 12 chapters introduce a plethora of characters to the extent that it is difficult to keep up with them and then the investigation proceeds with a number of obvious questions unanswered ie where did Rose Shepherd get an income, what is the provenance of the Bulgarian detective and others. Sgt. Fry is determined that the husband set the house fire and does not consider the evidence already given, very frustrating especially as the book the darts to an end again leaving unfinished threads. A good story but the

loose ends give it a 3 star rating for me.

Nick Duretta says

Two separate murder incidents occur within a week of one another in the quiet English Peak District backcountry. Are they connected? This is the second Booth police procedural I've read and it's every bit as good as the first. The characters are extremely well-drawn, the setting vividly rendered, and the police appropriately fallable. They go down many blind alleys before arriving at the solution. This is a mystery to get lost in until the satisfying (and surprising) conclusion.

Monika says

Den här sjunde delen kan nog vara den med den tunnaste historien, av olika skäl som jag egentligen inte kan gå in på i detalj utan att avslöja för mycket. Men om man inte bryr sig om sådana petitesser så är den lika bra som de andra. Läs mer på min blogg

Sally says

This British police procedural has always been better than average, but this latest entry became a little tedious in the middle. It needs better pacing.

Tony Johnston says

I read this book because I have a sore back and was in bed for a day yesterday.

I don't regret reading it but I think it is only fair to warn people that this was possibly the most unrealistic crime novel plot I have ever come across. I say fair but that makes me sound altruistic: the real reason is that I am still slightly sore and have nothing much to do so I did this review. Otherwise I would have just put this aside as "experience learned, sore back day over, forget that awful plot".

And I do mean plot. Not writing, not characters, not atmosphere.

The writing was on par for a pulp crime novel. You know, the sort where protagonists DC/DS/DI/DCI Fry/Cooper/Laurie/Frost/Whatever have hinted-at dark back-stories and inner demons, where there is a bit of CID incident-room banter, snippets of CSI like info are offered during gruesome crime scene descriptions and some paper-thin background characters called Darren/ Sharon/ Brian Smith/ Jones/ Lilly wander around being interviewed/ running off/ lying/ coming clean just as the story requires.

As you would expect, twists are turned, grieving relatives turn out to be villains, Kevin/ Darren/ Baz/ Mr Shankly turns out to be misunderstood/ much-maligned/ an ex-prostitute / a woman/ criminally insane/ flatulent pain in the arse and that plumber/ handyman/ waitress/ forklist driver with the beady/ dark/ shifty eyes was definitely a wrong-un/ saviour/ child molester/ new-age freak.

Oh and finally, the denouement is deliberately never quite clean enough for you to feel like you are done with the aforesaid protagonists and so will buy another book.

No problem with that. The Derbyshire setting is also rather nice.

Jeez, look at the cover. Believe me, I didn't expect Kafka. Although strangely...never mind.

So it all makes for a faintly atmospheric read, reminiscent of an instantly forgettable night in front of the telly watching a crime film. I don't have a telly as it happens but I do remember the concept.

BUT (and this is one screaming whopping BUT) if I am going to read 630 pages of the written equivalent of junk food, I would kind of expect the thing to make some sort of sense. The crime writer has all the freedom in the world to (as it were) choose his poisons carefully. Perhaps he or she might delight us by describing realistic crimes but done by made-up nasty people in wonderfully spooky locations. They might scare us by alluding to real-life events but with a new twist that makes us wonder.

Or in this case they could improve the book by just having a plot that features even vaguely earth-bound coincidences.

"The Bulgarian hitch-hiker shot the dinosaur in the Mill from the top of a caravan while speaking to the phone booth through the high-powered rifle; in the meantime, after the fireworks the photos were faked because Dad is a cold-war spy and Darren is mafia kingpin which is why they both torched the joint. You'll never take me alive copper. Da, where I come from the Bulgari Andrei Unrealistikov is swimming with the Kalashnikovs. Bang, bang." sums up my understanding of the plot.

Due to the pain in my sore back, I may have got a few details wrong here and there but frankly my version is just as good as the real one. In short, it stinks.

I won't say any more except that if anyone could describe the actual plot to someone else and report back to me here that their listener found it coherent and realistic then I will happily give this 4 stars and we'll say no more.

Paul Trembling says

The thing I most liked about this book was the setting - areas of Derbyshire that I know fairly well and which are well described. The Police procedure was authentic as well, and overall the plot was well worked out.

However, it fell down a bit on the details, especially in regard to the forensics. It's perhaps because I know too much about the subject, but I'm disappointed to find a crucial plot point hung on an unlikely forensic recovery. I won't go into the details, not wishing to spoil it for anyone who's not as particular about it as I am!

Overall, it was readable, but a little too slow for a thriller, and a little too vague in the details for a mystery.

Stuart says

This book was OK. There was a good plot, but it was revealed in an incoherent way, I felt. Why, for example, did we have a car exploded in the main street? It seems to have been just a distraction. I also found the detectives mannerisms a little intrusive. Perhaps if I had read the previous books in the series, it might have helped with that, but as often happens, I jumped in to a series in the middle. I also felt that the eventual killers were not totally plausible.... I don't see me reading the other books.

Natalie Veart says

long winded and unnecessarily convoluted. this one was a struggle.

Shireen says

After reading mysteries of varying quality by writers unknown to me, it was a pleasure -- a comforting, familiar pleasure -- to pick up where I had left off in Stephen Booth's Cooper and Fry series several months ago. I devoured it.

Then I lay back, somnolent from total satiation. That can be the only reason I took so long to write this review, for the book is good. In the previous books in this series, there had been much about Fry's or Cooper's personal stories woven throughout the mysteries, with angst and unhappy feelings dominating Fry's story. It was a relief that this book concentrated on the mysteries, with only a sliver of personal story. It's not that I didn't enjoy learning about these characters, what shaped them, how they came to be in Edendale, it's that it was time for a change-up and a lessening of the angst.

The mysteries themselves were satisfying -- complex, engaging the mind, unfolding right to the end. And I was rather pleased with myself that I saw the final detail coming, although I did not solve the central whodunnit part. I saw some reviewers had complained that there was too much detail. But I had just read a book with too little, which is extremely unsatisfying. You could shrink the book down to almost novella size, like this other writer had done their story, but then you'd miss out on the nuances, the red herrings, the feeling of the Peak District, the characters coming to life and drawing you in to their lives, the emotions, the mood, the colours and smells and sounds of the events and the landscape. You'd miss out on caring what happens. It's the details that separate a so-so writer from the ones who absorb you into their stories.
