



Blackbox: A Novel in 840 Chapters

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Cross a road, take a train, or get on an airplane and you put your life in the hands of a stranger -- every bit as screwed up, every bit as fallible and as human as you are. Then the person turns out not to be a stranger at all, and suddenly it's much worse.

In America and Britain and the sky in between, an apparently disparate group of people is connected, whether intimately or by chance, to the tragic death of a stowaway on board flight AF266.

As the action veers across countries and time zones, the stowaway's real identity is revealed through stolen black box recordings, answering machine messages, sitcom outtakes, and court transcripts. Told in a shifting, circular narrative, the interwoven lives make up a jolting and layered puzzle that builds to a heart-stopping, chilling climax.

An intelligent and invigorating novel with a bizarre menu of dysfunctional characters, *Blackbox* is the story of an attempt to erase a life on tape.

Blackbox: A Novel in 840 Chapters Details

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From Reader Review **Blackbox: A Novel in 840 Chapters** for online ebook

Jayne Charles says

This is the complex and highly entertaining account of a group of people connected by a tragic event aboard an aeroplane in the 1970s. Some are connected directly to the event, others more tenuously. But all are fascinating in their own way, all have their little quirks, and in a long book all have a chance to shine.

It's a sort of take on the six degrees of separation idea, and I guess if you drew a diagram with all the characters on it, with lines showing the connections between them, the result would be the sort of horrendous tangled knot my i-pod headphones tend to get in when left in my pocket. My brain wasn't big enough to hold all the links, or to fully understand every single facet of the story, but what I did like very much was the attention to detail, and the little moments of humour. Like where Sam the voice-over artiste was in a lift and was astonished to find his own voice telling him what floor he was on.

There was a serious side to it too. Death is never far from the thoughts of the characters, and in particular the last words of suicides or accident victims. At one point "Unfunny John", a stand-up comedian whose entire act consists of him shooting himself in the head, suggests that planes should be fitted with individual blackboxes – one for each passenger "just in case they found themselves next to a stranger who meant nothing to them. They could record a message to a loved one, or to humanity. It would be a valuable contribution to the understanding of the human condition". His companion points out that it would never happen – it would serve to make passengers more nervous – but I thought it was an interesting idea all the same.

It's a quirky book, eschewing chapters in favour of short snappy sections numbered backwards from 840 to 0 in the manner of a countdown. Some sections consist of nothing but an ellipsis, most are no more than a paragraph or so and make the most of the author's economical, punchy writing style. For all its quirks it is fundamentally a great read, I do hope there will be more from this author.

Beth says

An enjoyably fast-paced and intriguingly written exploration of the degrees of separation that exist between people. It certainly suffers for not fleshing out some of the characters enough, a couple of the women in particular seem entirely interchangeable (and all so obsessed with suicide!) The ending doesn't live up to the set-up, but it's a good holiday read... unless, of course, you're flying!

SmarterLilac says

Delightfully bizarre.

It takes a while to sift through the disparate characters' voices, and even longer to get to the emotional heart of their connection, (a dead stowaway) but it's worth it. Mr. Walker can write up a storm. The

characterization here is subtle but strong, and has more than a little bit of wit. I wish I'd found this in 2002, when its discussions of ideology, desperate relationships and the loneliness that makes strangers take enormous risks for each other, would have precisely captured the cultural zeitgeist of the day (not that the book is exactly irrelevant now.)

While this is not a novel for those with short attention spans, it's a new favorite of mine and one of the best I read in 2013.

Glenn says

Unique concept. Decent debut. Somewhat difficult to figure out what's going on at the beginning, due to all the characters and the short snippets (840 chapters!) but as you get further into the novel it comes together. I'd rate this 3.5 stars if I could.

Neil Crossan says

This is such a NC book. Short chapters, lots of negativity, it's almost as if I wrote this except I would have used a lot more, "she crept across the creaky wood floor and she was a mother fucker" or "the harvest moon lit the damp moor. It was a time for public drunks or people otherwise described as mother fuckers." The theme of *Blackbox* is that the world has no strangers, we're all related by some degree of separation. That when you get on that flight to Memphis there is a chance that you could somehow know the pilot. "Attention passengers we'll be flying at 30,000 feet before I start fucking with the flight plan and blaming it on turbulence. So strap yourselves in, because I'm your pilot ... Neil Crossan!" *Blackbox* jumps from storyline to storyline, with enough twists to keep you interested in the short story. But by the end you leave the book not really knowing any of the characters and frankly being kind of happy that you don't. (5/10)

Brian says

this one has a lot of interconnected story lines, some of which are engaging...others not so much. it also felt a little too derivative of much more talented authors. i like short chapters, though, of which this book has many. so it has got that going for it.

Aaron says

I liked this book a lot.

It reminded me of *Magnolia*. You know how *Magnolia* had a whole bunch of characters and, as the movie unfolded, you began to notice the ways they were all connected? Some of those connections were pretty subtle. This book is a lot like that. It concerns thirty or so characters and their connection, be they obvious or subtle, to an Asian woman who dies while stowing away on an international flight.

The characters include: A stewardess who helps the Asian woman board the plane and now feels responsible

for her death. An environmental terrorist who falls in love with a voice on the radio. An actress who commits suicide to protect herself from her father. An actor who pines for her suicide note, fearing her death might have been his fault. A comedian who "blows his own brains out" whenever an audience doesn't laugh. A psychiatrist who needs to learn to speak in a Scottish accent because he's in love with a woman who thinks it's his voice on the book-on-tape versions of his how-to books. A radio talk show host who vows revenge on a caller who called her a whore. A mental patient posing as a psychiatrist. A writer who breaks into people's homes to collect things to write stories about. A woman who flies to prove that of all of her phobias, fear of flying isn't one of them.

The dialogue is hilarious and quick. The story is plausible and chilling (though a story thread about a blackbox recording inadvertently winding up on side two of a fear of flying self-help tape falls strangely flat-I was intrigued and wanted to know how such a mix-up could occur). The format is strange, setting itself up as a backward countdown from 840 to one, but the reasons for this become clear by the end. And the big build-up to a final confrontation on The Penny Lock Show has to be read to be believed.

Nick Walker is a writer of vast imagination and appeal. New writers just should not be allowed to write this well.

Highly, highly recommended. Blackbox is one of the best books I've read all year.

Patrick says

A fun, easy-to-read ride. I enjoyed this unpredictable and unique read. I found myself having a hard time putting it down the closer I got toward the end. There is a lot of time bouncing around and characters to follow but you'll catch on and is worth giving a shot. Most any book that is different from any other book I've read I do enjoy.

Neal says

I wasn't very impressed with this book. It has a few story lines that are supposed to mesh into one. Until the last 30 pages or so the book is disjointed and doesn't follow any one story for more than a few paragraphs. The stories are ok.. but I wouldn't recommend this book to people unless they have a good attention span.

Danny says

Unfunny comedians are funny.

Authors are constantly striving to be 'original' these days, and for the most part, this doesn't work. but once in a while a gem will creep up and reading it will be an unforgettable experience. I am yet undecided as to if this is one of those gems or not. it's premise is well meaning, 840 chapters, most of them consisting as one or two words. to me this just seems like a lazy alternative to building up tension and a fast pace in the traditional way; through atmosphere.

But i still can't bring myself to dislike it.

it's clever, touching, unique, and ultimately -very, very funny.

Erin Beck says

This was the hardest book I've read in a long time, took me over a week to read. When reading Tolstoy I've always had to make a chart on the inside cover of people's names, surnames, occupations. This book comes with that chart already made for you.

This is because there are so many characters, and each is sometimes called by their first name, sometimes by their last name, and other times by their occupation. It was confusing and no one really did anything to stand out in the beginning so I was constantly checking the chart.

Besides all the confusion of not knowing who was who, by the last third of the book things were coming together and I started really enjoying it. Too bad it didn't happen sooner.

The book is written in 3rd person until a little after half way, then all the sudden there's a narrator. It took me several pages to figure out who was talking to me and where they fit in the story. I thought it a nice surprise.

Steelie says

It took me until almost the end to figure out who was who. the book goes back and forth between many scenarios, so it is a bit hard to follow. However, I had trouble putting it down and once I finished it, I wanted to read it again so that I could understand it better.

Robert says

The neatest thing about this book is also its downfall: 840 chapters in 300 pages ... even for those with ADHD it can be too much. Still, you'll never read anything like it, so that's why I'm giving it a three.

Anne says

What a wonderful, weird, odd book. A fun, sad, disturbing read. And yes, it is possible to be all three. If you like off-beat, slightly transgressive fiction then check this one out. I think I might be the only person who has read this so you'll probably be able to find it cheap in a remainder bin. Which is a shame because it is such a good and imaginative book. One that will stay with you long after you read it.

Ana says

A little bit bizzare. Trying to follow the thread and hoping somewhere along the line I'll find the main path.

Ok. I tried and for a small book, I found it bizarre, depressing and I just couldn't get through it.
