

Earlsdon Literary Magazine 182

The newsletter of the AVID Readers Group, based at Earlsdon Library

Following meeting: Thursday 10 December 8pm

Venue: Earlsdon Library

Book for discussion: *Lone Wolf*—Jodi Piccoult

“Maybe we chose the wrong book”

Our November Book

Last Man Standing—David Baldacci

Well, this was a bit of a departure for most AVID readers and, unlike the historical detective books that have pleasantly surprised many of us, it's not an author or a genre we intend to explore further. Even Eve, champion of gritty writing, had to force herself to finish it. Why?

Where to start? First of all the plot was somehow both rather involved and too short for the length of the book. It relied on some unlikely events, connections and coincidences that needed exhaustive explanations and led to several gory blood baths which were described in great detail – along with every weapon used in them. There was a sex scene (can a blockbuster book do without one?) but it didn't involve the hero and his love interest (more on that anon) so it felt tacked on and gratuitous – especially as neither of the characters involved was at all sympathetic. Actually, most of the characters were rather one-dimensional and macho – so I suppose we can at least say the women were (reasonably) strong. The putative romance was left hanging, which means we were spared at least one cliché but does suggest there might be a sequel (!).

So what was the story? Basically Web London is an HRT agent (which means he's part of a hostage response team rather than a drug-company rep) who finds himself in disgrace

because he survives a gun battle in which the rest of his team are slaughtered. He sets out to investigate what happened, in spite of the disapproval of everyone, and uncovers a plot involving a missing child, a cult, various gangs, corruption in high places and, by way of light relief, a clandestine porn studio and an unexpected taxidermist. And London himself is the key: it's his past actions that have led to the whole sorry mess (although, of course, he had good reasons at the time for doing one thing and the author managed to find a way of making sure the other was outside his control without making him seem weak).

But no book is entirely bad, is it? We conceded that, once it was unravelled, the plot was quite clever really and we were all (or at least those of us that got as far as meeting him properly) rooting for the missing child and even had some admiration for his protective and frantic, albeit thuggish, brother.

So, as noted above, none of us at the meeting had read anything by this author before and none of us intend to read more. But what if this is Baldacci's *Stonehenge*? Can all his fans be so wrong?

Any volunteers to read another and find out?

Catherine Fitzsimons

Next month we will be reading:

The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency—Alexander McCall Smith

The date for discussion of this book is 14 January 2016.