



## The Company of Fellows

*Dan Holloway*

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## **The Company of Fellows** Dan Holloway

Imagine the Hannibal Lecter novels set in Oxford University.

"the plot rattles along at a great pace with enough twists to keep the most restless armchair detective guessing...add another cracking book the illustrious tales of this most murderous city. Do yourself a favour and pop into the shop to pick up a copy and enter the the dark, disturbing and at times depraved world of The Company of Fellows" (Review by Blackwell's Bookstore)

The Company of Fellows is a psychological mystery set in the dark heart of England's oldest University. The perfect read for fans of the Hannibal Lecter novels, Val McDermid, Minette Walters, Mo Hayder or P D James.

In June 2011, The Company of Fellows was voted "FAVOURITE OXFORD NOVEL" in a poll by the world-famous bookstore Blackwell's and the paperback was given a window and front table display.

Tommy West was a brilliant academic, until a breakdown stopped him in his tracks 12 years ago. He has reinvented himself as a successful interior designer. His new life is comfortable, in every way, and safe. But life without the intellectual challenge is slowly suffocating him.

Charles Shaw is a world-famous professor of theology and sensualist: unpopular with all his colleagues, loathed by his ex-wife and, as of five minutes ago, dead.

As a student, Shaw was Tommy's mentor. Now Tommy must draw on the professor for inspiration one more time in order to find his killer. But all he has to go on are a handful of papers for the controversial research the professor was working on when he died.

The unspeakable truth about the Professor's death lies buried in the past: somewhere between the night his daughter was born - and her twin sister stillborn - and the day Tommy broke down. But for Tommy the past is a dangerous place, a long way from the safety he has so carefully built for himself. Can he find the answers before time, and his sanity, run out?

## **The Company of Fellows Details**

Date : Published February 25th 2011 (first published 2011)

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Author : Dan Holloway

Format : Kindle Edition 319 pages

Genre : Mystery, Crime, Fiction

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## From Reader Review *The Company of Fellows* for online ebook

### J.F. Penn says

I'm a Theology graduate from Oxford, so I was fascinated to delve back into my own history in this book. It's an intelligent mystery with some very dark characters, and a couple of great plot twists. At points, I think the book could be defined as horror, since the author doesn't hold back with some graphic description. Squeamish readers should probably not try it!

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### Andy Smith says

This promised a lot more than it delivered, for me.

A decent enough and engaging basic premise, some nice twists, but ultimately I had trouble suspending disbelief.

The Kindle version probably hasn't been copy edited either because there are an amazing number of typographical errors (repeated words, misspelled words that ended up making other valid but contextually wrong words, missing words, transposed words). I don't just mean "oh I noticed 3 errors in this book", I mean more like "I couldn't go 10 pages without spotting an error" which I found extremely distracting.

Having said all that, I read it in four days (helped that I was ill in bed for much of two of them) and I couldn't put it down so it wasn't too bad. Just not as good as it could have been.

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### Rob Saunders says

Excellent book, well written. Painted the atmosphere of Oxford very well and I thoroughly enjoyed it. There were a couple of parts which made me squirm slightly but I got past them quickly!

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### Ben says

It begins so quietly, this novel. So unostentatiously. Granted, there are two corpses in Chapter 1 – it is a murder mystery, after all – but there is little, at first, to indicate that *The Company of Fellows* is anything other than just another detective story set in Oxford, following in the well-worn footprints of Morse.

The writing is a good deal better than Colin Dexter's, which is to be expected. But in other respects the early chapters came as a surprise. For Dan Holloway is a tireless and selfless champion of alternative, edgy, indie writing (some of it, it must be said, a long way removed from his own literary calibre). Yet here he seems to be embarking on something more mainstream – an honest to goodness murder mystery, a thumping good read which manages to remain thought-provoking, told with flair, panache and insight.

It isn't that simple, of course. Holloway's calm, unemotional prose draws you along until you find yourself enmeshed in a harrowing ethical dilemma. And here it does get edgy, in content if not in style. The reader will need a strong stomach and colossal control of their own emotions to read beyond a certain point, but, despite the enormity of his subject matter, Holloway handles it with sensitivity and humanity. Moreover, he is not being gratuitously scatological: he has a reason to go where he does, though not every reader should be expected to go there with him.

There are many different Oxfords, in literature as in life. One suspects this particular Oxford, with its blend of rarefied collegiate life and thriving alternative culture, would be more familiar to Sergeant Hathaway than to either Morse or Lewis; certainly Holloway himself is very much at home there. The descriptions are clear, accurate and specifically Oxonian – and they are far more perceptive than most observations of Oxford, particularly about the mechanics of academe. (The comment – is the narrator's tongue resting lightly inside his cheek? – about the Warden's knack "of being someone who brought funding with him wherever he went" rings absolutely true.)

Above all, this is an Oxford peopled with true intellectuals, people who can deduce an entire chain of events from a single line in a page of research notes – and moreover, with characters who can read one another's thoughts, motives and intentions from nothing more than a twitch of an eyebrow. My own eyebrow was raised fractionally at the idea that there might be so many people with such similar skills – from reading body-language to gourmet cuisine – in such close proximity, but if I had to suspend my disbelief at this, I did so willingly.

For Holloway is at his strongest when describing the inner workings of these characters, their thought processes and motives, particularly in the case of his protagonist Tommy West. He has endowed Tommy with an impressive quantity of baggage which will, no doubt, allow much scope for introspection and further character development in the two sequels promised for 2011 and 2012. Other characters are equally complex, particularly Professor Charles Shaw (the second of the corpses), whose motives do not always appear clear or consistent; it will take a second reading to understand him more fully.

It is no disrespect to Holloway's impressive indie credentials to say that the book needs a thorough proofread. Along with a small handful of continuity errors (which could be easily corrected without damage to plot or structure), one's attention is constantly distracted by typos – at least one or two per page – which in some cases leave one in the tantalising position of not knowing what the author meant to say.

However, no quantity of typos can turn good writing into bad, and this is very good writing. I very much look forward to the next Tommy West novel, *All the Dark Places*, scheduled for release in December 2011.

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## **Ken Consaul says**

Like the previous reviewer I wanted to like this. The author can write sentences, paragraphs, even pages with great insight and wonderful feeling. Unfortunately, beyond the aforementioned soul searching there isn't

much story.

There's a murder at Oxford University, a mentor of a former student turned interior designer. As a favor to the family and as a personal obligation, he undertakes to unravel it. This is accomplished through interviews over eclectic and scrupulously prepared meals, wine tastings and cocktail parties. We learn as much about fabrics, curios, and far too much about obscure wine vintages than we do the crime.

Besides the main character and his present and former girlfriends, the other participants are vapid, self-important faculty types I couldn't care less about. The tour of Oxford and its environs seemed as important as the story. Maybe not as important as the main characters neuroses and workouts but a close second.

All in all, too bad. Holloway can get the words down in a most entertaining way but there is just no story behind it.

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### **Susanne says**

This was a beautifully written book, very atmospheric and quite delicious to read in certain parts. Of course, there is a very dark underlying core to the book and some very grisly parts, which make my stomach churn a couple of times.

Dan writes extremely well and his recent success is well deserved.

There are several typos/formatting errors in the Kindle version, but it didn't really detract from my enjoyment of the book. However, it does annoy me when formatting for Kindle is lax.

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### **Margarita Morris says**

This is a very interesting, intelligently written mystery with a plot that draws you in, some great twists and well-rounded characters. The writing is of a really high standard and would be almost perfect if it weren't for the dozens of typos. The text needs a really good proofread.

8.4.16. - Update to the review - the author tells me the text has now been thoroughly proofed. Definitely worth a go!

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### **J.R. says**

I found the premise engaging and wanted to like this psychological novel more than I did.

Unfortunately, the descriptions of the Oxford community are more developed than the characters. The plot stalls in long patches of profundity and soul-searching and staggers to an implausible ending.

On the plus side, there are sections of good and beautiful writing. There are also places where we have such tedium as:

“Hello. How are you?”

“I’m fine. What about you?”

“Whatcha been up to?”

Yada, yada, yada.

There are also a plethora of typos, which doesn’t help. An editor would have been beneficial.

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### **James Everington says**

I thought I'd try this book after enjoying the same author's great literary book *Songs From The Other Side of The Wall*. *The Company of Fellows* is a detective novel, and as such slightly more conventional. It's still obviously by the same author though, with it's strong descriptions of Oxford in particular really capturing the mood of the place. Wine and philosophical theories of pleasure feature heavily, both as background and providing clues for the murder at the heart of the story.

The mystery element is done really well - clues and red herrings well placed, a solid resolution that I didn't get, despite all the signs being there... Equally good is the characterisation - Holloway's protagonists start the novel with previous relationships and histories already in place, and these are changed and challenged by events. In this sense, it reminded me very strongly of Kate Atkinson's Jackson Brody novels - high praise.

The narrative is very dark at times, and therein lies the only fault for me - sometimes the mood change between the eloquent realism of most of the novel and some of the dark places it takes you, and then back again, was too abrupt; too jarring. But this is a picky quibble.

Recommended.

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### **Marva says**

At some point, I asked myself why I was continuing to read the book since I wasn't enjoying it. It's written reasonably well, so that's not the fault.

I just found myself tiring of the main characters constant soul-searching with little or no progression in the plot. For goodness sakes, two people have been murdered! Why aren't we getting even a clue about why other than a lot of talk about wine. Or maybe that should be "whine" since the main character does a lot of that.

Sorry, I just couldn't finish it. It started with great promise, but led nowhere. I've got lots of other books to read, so I'm moving on.

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## **Katherine Coble says**

I want to erase this book from my mind. While parts of it are well-written in a lyrical fashion, this is by far the most depraved and perverse thing I have ever read. Out of thousands and thousands of books--including more than a hundred about serial killers and psychosexual deviants--this book has the single worst and most disgusting things in it I have ever laid eyes on.

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## **Karen Lowe says**

An entertaining mystery - I found Tommy's inner traumas made the book more interesting, and enjoyed his interaction with the characters. On the whole a good mystery though perhaps just a few more twists in the tale than are believable. But at least the sprinkling of typos wasn't too offputting.

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## **TC says**

I previously read another book by this author, which I liked, but when I saw this book the synopsis sounded much closer to my usual taste. This line particularly caught my attention: "Imagine the Hannibal Lecter novels set in Oxford University. The Company of Fellows is a dark psychological mystery for anyone who loves Thomas Harris, Val McDermid, Minette Walters, P D James, or anything to do with Oxford." The only author on that list who doesn't feature several times on my bookshelves is P D James (think I'll have to rectify that soon) so it sounded right up my street.

Tommy West had a bright future as an academic until a breakdown halted his career in its tracks. He has since forged a successful career in interior design but his old life is brought back to the forefront when a former employer drops dead on his doorstep and his mentor, Professor Charles Shaw, kills himself. Armed with the research the Professor had done for his last project and urged on by his 18 yr old daughter, who is convinced her father was murdered, Tommy finds himself drawn back into the claustrophobic world of academia. As well as revisiting his academic past old flame Emily is now a police officer, investigating Shaw's death.

This is a dark and quite disturbing thriller. Some characters appear on par with Harris' Hannibal Lecter in terms of potentially sociopathic tendencies, their acts justified in the name of academic study. Some readers may find the themes make for uncomfortable reading, it made my stomach turn at one point in particular, but this isn't a blood and gore thriller. It is beautifully descriptive and brooding, and I found the Oxford setting and the author's style made a very pleasant change from the bulk of mainstream thrillers.

As well as the complicated story surrounding Shaw's demise the reader gets drawn into worrying about the impact going back to these surroundings is having on Tommy, and wondering whether he will find romance. There are plenty of suspects if Shaw has indeed been killed and the plot twists and turns - I certainly didn't see the end coming. Tommy is a very cultured man, surrounded by erudite people, and his consideration of Shaw's research to try and unlock the key to the mystery brings up some really interesting theological questions. I liked Tommy and was concerned for him as he got deeper into the mystery, wishing he hadn't.



I'm afraid there was a bit of a negative for me though. Unlike the other book I have read by this author there were more than a couple of typos. Compared to some books I've read it wasn't too bad but in places the typos made me chuckle where I shouldn't have, which is a bit off-putting. The formatting was fine and the typos are nothing a good proofread and update won't fix.

In the main this was a really good thriller, not quite as literary in style as the author's other book but still enough to set it apart positively from many other offerings, and well worth the bargain 70p price tag.

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### **Kathryn says**

The Company of Fellows is an intelligent, involved and involving thriller set in the claustrophobic cloisters of an Oxford University college.

Following a breakdown, Tommy West abandoned academia twelve years ago on the eve of what promised to be a brilliant career. Still based in the university town but now a widely-travelled and successful interior designer, Tommy carefully monitors and manages his ongoing recovery with exercise and other coping mechanisms. When his former college professor and mentor, Dr Charles Shaw, sensualist and outspoken professor of theology, is found dead, Tommy finds himself being drawn back into the cloying world of egos and secrets he left behind all those years earlier. The police investigation, which is headed up by his ex-girlfriend, believes the professor's death to be suicide but Charles' daughter, Becky, doesn't believe this and asks Tommy to find out what really happened. It's a task that will test him and his fragile hold on his sanity to its upper limits, as he races against time to discover the truth before suffering a further breakdown.

Dan Holloway's first Tommy West thriller is an exceptionally clever novel, intricate and complex, and rich with ideas and description, though happily none of these affects the pace. I don't know whether to advise reading this on an empty stomach or not, as some of the novel is gruesome and harrowing in its detail but then the descriptions of food and drink are so mouth-watering as to be almost physically painful, if you haven't eaten or drunk anything before reading! I'll leave it for you to decide but I can only recommend reading this thought-provoking and challenging but highly-enjoyable thriller.

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### **Sheila Myers says**

The Company of Fellows is a thought-provoking book. Dan Holloway did a very good job of developing a plot which is far different than other crime novels I have read. It delves into the psychology of the pleasures of life and, although a fictional work, it shows what could be a very real motivation for murder. Mr. Holloway also develops the characters in such a way as to make them realistic. If that were all there was to this book, I would give it the highest rating. Unfortunately, as an author, I can not read a book without catching many of the mistakes missed in the proofreading stage, if this was done at all. I do understand that independent authors may not be able to hire professional editors and that even traditionally published books contain mistakes. That said, I had to lower my rating because of the numerous typos, missing/extra punctuation, and other editing problems which greatly distracted me from thoroughly enjoying the book.

