



Nineteen Seventy Four

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It's winter, 1974, Yorkshire, and Ed Dunford's got the job he wanted. Crime correspondent for the Evening Post. He didn't know it was going to be a season in hell. A dead little girl with a swan's wings stitched to her back. A gypsy camp in a ring of fire. Corruption everywhere you look.

In *Nineteen Seventy Four*, David Peace brings passion and stylistic bravado to this terrifyingly intense journey into a secret history of sexual obsession, greed and sadism.

Nineteen Seventy Four Details

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Author : David Peace

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From Reader Review Nineteen Seventy Four for online ebook

Susan says

Set in Leeds, in the run up to Christmas 1974, this novel is full of anything but Christmas cheer. Edward Dunford is the North of England crime correspondent on the Yorkshire Post - desperate to make his name and always coming second to veteran reporter Jack Whitehead, a man on easy terms with both the police and court personnel. The story begins during a conference at a police station, asking for information on missing ten year old Clare Kemplay. After the conference, Dunford rushes to the funeral of his father and, in many ways, the entire book is like that opening chapter. This is noir at it's darkest, with Edward Dunford chasing leads amongst a cynical population, where the police are corrupt and the 'good guys' only less marginally violent than the criminals.

It is soon apparent that Dunford is in far over his head. A story he had previously covered about the 'Ratcatcher', that by a colleague about building regulations, missing schoolgirls, a missing rugby player and gangsters collide in a frenetic and utterly compelling storyline. This is a world of pub toilets, office banter, physical attacks and, more than anything, the loss of three little girls. It is fair to say that none of the characters are particularly likeable, even our 'hero' Dunford - whose search for the truth owes as much to his career as his desire to find the truth, especially at the beginning of the book, and who is not even thoughtful towards the two women who he is linked to. However, if you like your crime realistic, violent, fast paced and hard hitting, it is fair to say that you will like this. I intend to take a deep breath before embarking on book two Red Riding Nineteen Seventy Seven: Red Riding Quartet.

Lisa says

Well...that was bloody grim.

Eddie Dunford is the crime reporter for the Yorkshire Evening Post when a little girl is found brutally murdered with swan's wings stitched into her back, and his colleague, chasing a story on corruption involving prominent local businessmen and public figures, winds up dead.

Chasing the link between the two, Dunford is soon drawn ever deeper into a brutal and corrupt work of casual racism and violence, in which children wind up dead and their murderers protected, a brutal police force acts as heavies for private interests, and absolutely nobody is clean.

Incredibly bleak and depressing, I nonetheless found this compelling, especially once I had an opportunity to read uninterrupted for longer than 10 minutes, and the stream of consciousness written style, which I'd initially found jarring, worked more for me as the story progressed and Dunford became increasingly desperate. However, this approach also meant that the climax left with with a slightly vague notion of who had done what and why, although it's entirely possible that that's more my fault than the author's.

I will come back to see how this quartet progresses, but it'll definitely be after I've dabbled in the shallower, lighter end for a while...

****Also posted at Randomly Reading and Ranting****

Ted says

3 ½ I guess.

This novel tells a pretty good story, about the abduction of a young girl, possible related abductions of other girls, how the story is handled by a fairly corrupt police establishment, how it's reported by a local newspaper, and ... well, it's a pretty good "page-turner" ... but I don't know, I just feel not all that enthusiastic about recommending it or rating it highly. In fact I really don't know what to say about what I *liked* in this book, other than the fact that I did read it over the course of about three days (during which I didn't have a whole lot of reading time), and read no other books during that time, so it was a story that held my interest. Beyond that? I don't know.

My favorite American crime writer, George Pelecanos, actually praises this book (back cover). He is quoted as saying that the book "is raw and furiously alive, the literary equivalent of a hard right to the jaw. David Pearce has delivered the finest crime fiction debut of the year." Well, but I still think Pelecanos writes better novels than this one.

The book is raw, both language and sex are raw, and the violence is raw. That doesn't disturb me in the least. (Pelecanos' novels are also raw, on at least the first two of those points.) But Pearce doesn't give us the characters that we can root for in the way Pelecanos does.

Here's some of the things that left me unimpressed.

1) Too many characters. This is a problem for me because of my memory, mostly. The characters that are mentioned frequently from the get-go I can handle. But there are many characters in this book that are mentioned very briefly the first time or two, then later in the book become more prominent/important. By that time their names were simply fog-shrouded signposts to me, and I didn't search back to find out who they really were.

2) The main character, the narrator (it's first person all the way) was unbelievable to me.

First, he's not a tough guy, except that he is able to punch out or otherwise physically harm several women in the story. But put him up against another man, and he basically is a punching bag – doesn't even put up a fight, gets the shit kicked out of him again and again. In fact he gets beaten worse than the previous time over and over, and eventually the sadism of his many beaters is so extreme that *I simply couldn't believe that within hours, he seems to be pretty much okay again*, as if that beating was nothing but a bout with alcohol, and requires no more than getting through the morning after hangover.

Second, he seems to cry a lot when he's confronted with photos of victims, or personal sob-stories from victims. I have no problem with his tears, but this simply seems thrown in by the author to make him more ... something, I don't know. *It doesn't seem to fit with the way he acts otherwise, his anger, his rough language.*

Our sensitive narrator also uses the phrase "I'm sorry" at least a hundred times in the story (it seems). Any

time he isn't demanding something, or pleading with someone to give him information, or saying "fuck", he's saying "I'm sorry". (**note:** re comment #4 below, this mildly disturbing aspect of the dialogue is apparently a realistic depiction of how the English speak.)

3) Like Pelecanos, Pearce throws in references to pop music throughout the story. But the mentions are just brief throwaways. The music means nothing to the characters, they aren't *playing it themselves because they like it* – it's just music they hear over the radio as they drive, or hear coming out of a club as they walk by or enter. It recalls the time, the era of the story – but nothing else.

4) The dialogue is perhaps realistic? But also a bit leaden. Just one example.

Paula Garland came back in and closed the red door. 'Sorry about that.'

'No, it's me that should be sorry, just phoning up ...'

'Don't be daft. Sit down will you.'

'Thanks,' I said and sat down ...

She started to say, 'About last night, I ...'

I put up my hands. 'Forget it.'

'What's happened to your hand?' Paula Garland had her own hand to her mouth, staring at the graying lump of bandages on the end of my arm.

'Someone slammed my car door on it.'

'You're joking?'

'No.'

'Who?'

'Two policemen.'

'You're joking?'

'No.'

'Why?'

I looked up and tried to smile. 'I thought you might be able to tell me.'

'Me?'

She had a piece of red cotton thread ... blah

But I said, 'The same two coppers warned me off after I was here on Sunday.'

'Sunday?'

'The first time I came here.'

'I never said anything to the police.'

'Who did you tell?'

'Just our Paul.'

'Who else?'

'No-one.'

'Please tell me?'

Paul Garland was standing ... blah

'Please, Mrs Garland ...'

'Paula', she whispered.

I just wanted to stop ... blah

But I said, 'Paula please, I need to know.'

... 'After you went, I was upset and ...'

'Please?'

Oh well.

Look, there are two more books in this series. As of May '17 I've decided I will try to get the next book in the series read - maybe sometime this year.

But I'm just not bowled over by Mr. Pearce. Maybe you will be. If you like raw crime fiction give it a try.

NB. By the way, as I understand, the reason for all the accolades was basically the backstory of the novels, that is, the utter corruption of the regional police and the horrendous violence they routinely perpetrated in order to cover up this corruption. So maybe you're not supposed to pay too much attention to the characterization?

Sheila says

Originally posted at www.bookertease.blogspot.ca

Now, I know that normally I do my book reviews at the midpoint... but having a few reviews under my belt by now, I have come to the realization that that doesn't always work. Sometimes there is no secret to be uncovered so there is nothing for me to guess at. Other times I am just too enthralled in the story; the thought of stopping and then taking the few days to write a review is just too hard! Sometimes a book is just so messed up that if I stop reading I may start to realize just how fucked up it is, and I will never start reading again. That was the case for *Nineteen Seventy Four* by David Peace.

Nineteen Seventy Four is the first of four in a series entitled the Red Riding Quartet. The series deals with police and political corruption in Yorkshire and was inspired by the Yorkshire Ripper murders – active between 1975 and 1980. It's the story of Eddie Dunford, *The Evening Post's* new crime reporter, promoted days after his father death. Right away Eddie gets in over his head; trying to connect the disappearance of a little girl to those of other missing girls, he is told under no circumstances to explore the connection. Days later when the little girl is found dead with swan wings stitched into her back Eddie is more determined than ever to find the connection. Unfortunately, Eddie is a coward and not too bright... not really the guy to bring the underhanded politically connected to light. The story itself is kind of insane and I am not sure that I could even try to begin to explain it. Eddie goes down a rabbit hole that connects just about everyone to the murder; from construction workers to police officers, business men and local politicians. He doesn't seem to know what to do with any of the information he obtains, half of it comes to him by accident, and he can't seem to stop getting beat up. All the while his mother is in mourning and trying to get him to come home.

The story is incredibly convoluted, although it mostly comes together in the end. I know a guy who has read all 4 books and he says that the stories make more sense when read as a whole – so I guess I will have to get on the rest of them soon! Cause they weird thing is – even though it was confusing and horrifying; I devoured the book. It was compelling and intriguing... and I needed to know whether Eddie even made it out alive (it was touch and go many times).

I had never heard of David Peace before being recommended this series, so I did a bit of research on him before writing my review. He seems like a pretty interesting character. He grew up in Yorkshire around the time of the Yorkshire Ripper Murders and became obsessed with the murders, even to the point of being afraid that his father might be the ripper. It turned out to be one Peter Sutcliffe who was convicted of murdering 13 women and attempting to murder another 7. It was a pretty scary time in Yorkshire and left a lasting impression on Peace, as he says in an interview with *Crime Time* “I wrote about Yorkshire in the 1970s and early 1980s because that was where I was and when I grew up and I still have the scars.” Peace

also goes on to talk about the responsibility of being a crime writer; "I believe the crime writer, by their choice of genre, is obligated to document these times and their crimes, and the writer who choose to ignore the responsibility is then simply exploiting, for his or her own financial or personal gratification, a genre that is itself nothing more than an entertainment industry constructed upon the sudden, violent deaths of other, innocent people and the unending, suffering of their families." Normally I am not so interested in an author's background – but the uniqueness of the horror that Peace writes had me intrigued. He is critical of most other crime writers, while praising the efforts of a few - but he is very specific about his criteria for how crime should be written "Crime is brutal, harrowing and devastating for everyone involved, and crime fiction should be every bit as brutal, harrowing and devastating as the violence of the reality it seeks to document. Anything less as best sanitises crime and its effects, at worst trivialises it. Anything more exploits other people's misery as purely vicarious entertainment. It is a very, very fine line." It was very interesting to read these statements given that I found Peace's descriptions of the crimes in his book as particularly gratuitous – he wants his writing to be 'brutal, harrowing and devastating' so how does he even determine what is crossing the line? How does one determine how much and which 'truth' should be given out? Especially when one is writing crime 'fiction'?

It keeps making me laugh that I rated this book so highly yet I seem to be pretty disparaging about it. I definitely do not recommend it for everyone, maybe only fans of pretty descriptive crime writing, or rather people who don't mind it. I am looking forward to finishing the series. I want to know where Eddie ends up in life... I don't expect he makes it very far....

Isabelle says

I actually read all four books in the series, thinking that at one point, I would change my mind and join David Peace's ever-growing fan club.

No such luck for me!!

The premise of the books is certainly very clever and promising: coming back to the same place and the same group of characters, every few years, to try and unravel murders that are obviously so interconnected that they seem to be the work of serial killer(s).

I also thought it was a good idea to change narrator with each book and pass the "baton" from one character to another.

However, those various narrators all have exactly the same "voice", which is so bothersome as to become laughable... all the more so since this "voice" is so contrived in its effort to be impressionistic: dream sequences and sensory experiences slash the narrative for all characters!!! Very irritating...

And of course, the books rapidly become formulaic (the path leading to "the" truth leads each and every narrator to a ghastly demise), clichés abound (the police force is corrupt, the press serves the local power houses, everyone in Yorkshire drinks alcoholically and religious fervor leads to insanity). And then, there are the non-sequitur incongruities: why do we need a mysteriously dark priest who exorcises his flock's demons with a 12 inch nail and a good hammer whack in the head? How does that serve the story? Is there a need for such added gore?

I am only skimming the surface of what I have to say about this four-novel saga... but this is enough said as I have wasted enough time with those books as it is!

Mark Desrosiers says

OK, sure here's December 1974, John Lennon just released his shittiest post-lost-weekend album, and David Peace has the gall to create a journalist-detective who's tougher than Jesus? Seriously, our narrator here -- a junior reporter who just lost his dad (zzzzzzzz) -- bumbles through this complex and dangerous murder investigation (dead raped girl with live swan's wings stitched to her back) while constantly drunk, hungover, popping pills, pulped, bloodied, tortured: a Caviezel-cavalcade of martyrdom. Yet his nether bone remains alive and fully functioning when the plot doesn't require it at all, except for that one miraculous and symbolic moment when he achieves non-consensual anal sex with one hand wrapped in a cast. Bigger than Jesus.

I dug the convolution of the plot -- the gay blackmail, the creepy locals, even the nasty beatdowns and torture of our hero (possibly copycatted at Abu Ghraib? -- this novel's from 1999), but I couldn't parse any relevant political/ideological lessons from the whole nutzoid collusion-conspiracy scene. It's all sensationalism and nasty, a Daily Mail front-pager to ring in New Year 1975. Our hero is a hapless priapic drunkard with a couple brain triggers that keep his scented trail alive, at least while his secret tape recorder's on. But when he fires up the cognition, finally, the murder mystery gets resolved in a corpse-filled, coal chamber of stoopid, with me staring goggle-eyed at the implausible resolution, and several loose ends (plus the narrator) left hanging... so, one star docked for a terrible Ellroy-lite ending.

Greg says

1.

As long as nothing really happened this book was pretty readable. It moved along at a quick clip, it had a certain zip to the writing style and it was like a junior league mid-period (*LA Quartet*) era James Ellroy. Sort of.

Once stuff started happening the book got worse. And as more stuff happened the worse the book got. And then as the book started to resolve and the mysteries began to be solved the book got even worse still. If the book had gone on much longer it may have turned into a mucoid stream of shit. Literally, the book would have turned into shit-like snot in my hands. That would have been pretty fucking gross.

2.

The book got worse.

The author likes recapping / repeating, in italics, lines that are *important to the resolution of the mystery* very soon after they are said in the text. Then he repeats them in italics over and over and over again in case you are a fucking moron who didn't catch it the first time *he repeated the lines with no structural slash narrative reason*. Over and over and over again. Towards the end you think maybe it is because the narrator is going insane, but then you say nah, it's because the author thinks his readers are fucking morons.

And we are if we believe in the believability of the main character.

3.

It adds neat little twists to a story when your narrator is basically fluid nonsense that can be morphed into whatever is needed for each scene. This adds the element of, wow I never saw it coming that he was going to anally rape that poor woman right after he said he loved her. Wow, what a twit he is he threw up just looking at an autopsy photo (I mean he is only a crime journalist, wouldn't think he'd come across something like that).

4.

Every character in the book probably shouldn't be implicated in the crime. Ok I'm jesting a little. But just a little. Who did it? We all did it. We are all guilty. Ok, good. We are all guilty now write a fucking coherent crime novel. Or maybe the review was a harking back to the *Scooby Doo* endings where every time you thought you knew who did it a mask was pulled off and you found out someone else was really guilty.

The book got worse

5.

I'll finish this review with my own neat-o-riffic homage to my favorite type of exchange the author wrote. At first I thought, what the fuck, when I read it. But then when the author repeated the style of dialog a second time (and I think a third time, maybe only twice though) I thought, wow I've never seen this in a book before. To think most authors would think of another way of handling this but David Peace doesn't shy away from the gritty realism.

"Tell me why you wrote this shitty book," I asked.

"No," David Peace responded.

"Tell me why!"

"No"

"Tell me why you did it."

"No, I won't tell you."

"Tell me."

"I won't."

"C'mon, tell me or I'll hit you."

"No I don't tell you, I'm not afraid of you."

"I'll hit you. Tell me."

"No."

"Please tell me?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"I want you to tell me."

"And I don't want to tell you."

"Tell me."

"No."

"Yes."

"No. I won't tell you."

"Tell me, we've been at this for almost a page, it can't go on much longer."

"I won't."

"Please? I can't go on asking you."

"No."

"I must go on asking you, please tell me."

"Hell no."

"Fuck you, tell me!"

"Fine. For the money, I did it all for the money."

"A-ha!"

Paul Bryant says

VERY GENERAL SPOILER ALERT

I just saw the TV movie dramatisation of this, entitled "Red Riding 1974" and I wanted to make a couple of notes here for myself really, to try and figure out a) why I hated it and b) why everyone else loved it. This is a not unfamiliar feeling for me of course but usually it'll be some major Hollywood blockbuster (Avatar!) or some chintzy adaptation of Charlotte Bronte that everyone is swooning about while I remain sneering haughtily at the array of lemmings before me. (It's not a pleasant characteristic I know.) Red Riding, though, is just up my street – gritty crime story set in working-class England in the 1970s, what's not to like? Well... once you peer through the grimy window and focus your eyes, you're in any old plot-by-numbers thriller all the way back to Chandler and Hammett, the guys who invented the cliches. And by now I'm demanding that thriller/crime story writers should have a whole NEW set of cliches. but David peace hasn't discovered them yet. So In this story you get

- the hero is a jack-the-lad who gets to shag the women
- there is a person who is trying to spill the beans to the hero but who's drugged/imprisoned in a mental institution/both before she can
- there is a femme fatale who looks innocent but it turns out she's all mixed up with the bad guys – surprise!!
- all the cops are corrupt
- the hero takes many bad beatings but just like a toy in a budgerigar's cage keeps woozily popping right back up, nothing can hospitalise this guy
- the bad guys keep killing anyone who knows too much just before the hero gets to them
- the bad guys don't mind killing the peripheral people, but for some strange reason they balk at killing the hero – now why would that be? Because it would be inconvenient for the author? Could be!

That's on one level but there's another thing which is much worse. A book/movie like this is the expression of a particular quasi-political argument which I don't buy, which is our old friend the Conspiracy Theory. The whole plot can be summed up thus: they're all in on it! This book is dressed up in the grungy clothing of verisimilitude – naturalistic setting and dialogue, expertly rendered period detail, references to real events – but it peddles a giant falsehood, which is in this case that top policemen would collude with a rich local businessman who happens to get off on slaughtering children (!); and the web of deceit involves local newspaper editors and various cop minions. I don't buy the psychology of the rich worldly guy who likes killing children and I don't buy the conspiracy – but many many people do, just as many people don't think Arabs flew the planes on 9/11. How serious are we to take this? Well, when it's Bond fighting Goldfinger we know it's a funny fantasy. But when the author is using child murder and police corruption for his story we may feel a little disappointed to discover they're just as much props to his noirish adolescent paranoia as the Batcave and green kryptonite were in the comics I used to collect.

That said, the movie is beautifully shot and acted. All dressed up and nowhere to go.

James says

David Peace's 'Red Riding' quartet of books ('1974', '1977', '1980' and '1983' respectively) provides us with an extremely intense, dark, brooding and menacing series of connected stories.

Set against the backdrop of Yorkshire (where Peace grew up) the books have the notorious 'Yorkshire Ripper' murders (1975-80) as an underlying, but almost omnipresent theme throughout.

These are hard books about hard people and hard lives with hard themes of murder, corruption, sexual obsession, sadism and then some – they are definitely not for the more faint-hearted reader.

Whilst I haven't as yet read Peace's 'Tokyo' Trilogy – the 'Red Riding' series of books are for me his strongest piece of work to date. Referred to by some as part of the British Noir genre, I think these books transcend those limitations. It doesn't feel as though Peace is trying to provide us with a British re-write of Chandler or Hammett, but something quite different.

I am not one to specifically enjoy violent novels / novels containing violence per se, or for the sake purely of the violence within. Peace's 'Red Riding' novels don't glorify the violence portrayed but acknowledge it and don't in any way shy away from it as an integral (although clearly hateful and terrifying) part of the darkest of social landscapes that he is portraying here. He is effectively holding a mirror up to some of the darkest themes and elements in a society, which although fictional – is frighteningly perhaps not in many ways that far from reality.

Whilst the UK TV adaptation of the 'Red Riding' books was very well produced, it somehow lost the edge that the books most definitely have. Worth watching, but as is usually the case – read the books first. All of which are consistently strong and compelling in a very gruesome and frightening way.

Bill says

This is the second of David Peace's books I have read (the first being *The Damned United*) the first was good, but for me 1974 is streets ahead. A real stormer of a book. I started it Saturday morning and finished it Sunday night. I am so looking forward to reading the next three in the series.

It has some fantastic prose and brilliant narrative flow. The research seems impeccable. A supreme crime novel and set not just in England but also in an area close to where I now live.

For me you would probably need to be a football (soccer to my US friends) fan to enjoy *The Damned United*. However if you enjoy a good crime story or indeed just a bloody good story read David Peace's 1974 now!

Richard Wright says

There is no comfort at all to be had in this book. It's bleak to the point of despair, from the first page to the last, swallows you into itself whole, and tries to drown you in misery and corruption. Even the expected hero of the piece, journalist Eddie Dunford, is despicable and deserves at least some of what he ultimately endures as his exploitative investigation into a child serial killer spirals out of his control, and collides with a conspiracy of violent, powerful men. The pace is manic, the prose structure innovative and poetic, and the

effect bewildering and sometimes close to hallucinogenic. Unrelenting, but memorable.

J. Kent Messum says

A bloody brilliant book. David Peace's writing is sharp, sometimes unhinged, and its barreling pace just whips you along. A thriller that tosses murder, corruption, and characters around like a cement mixer. The plot is complex, an ongoing spiderweb of violence, set-ups, double crosses and the like, all stemming from the disappearance of a young girl and one green journalist's mission to uncover the truth. This novel will require your undivided attention as you navigate its uncomfortable murk. Some of it will seem confusing, much like how the narrator was confused throughout, but I believe that was the intention.

On that note, 1974 is very much a story of its time. Northern England in the 70s was a rough, racist, homophobic, and misogynistic environment (like the majority of places in the West at that period). I've noticed an awful lot of people whinging and whining in their reviews of this book over the swearing, perceived sexism, and politically incorrect nature surrounding the story. It reminded me of those people complaining about the language of the junkies in my novel 'BAIT'... to which I always thought, "Christ, have you ever heard an addict or crack-head actually talk???"

Yep, there are an awful lot of 'fucks' in this book, that's how people from lower and middle classes spoke back then (Fuck me, it's even worse now I think). The dialogue is spot on, as is the vibe and reality of that place in those days.

Honestly, if historical accuracy and time-capsule culture in a story offends you, then get bent. Past realities are not going to censor themselves because you've decided to crawl out of your sheltered life to risk a look around.

Altogether 1974 is a cracking read, and one I highly recommend for style, story, and substance.

Ben Loory says

this world is hell and we're all gonna die, but there's a slight possibility you might be able to do something good before the end, not that it would matter in any way, shape, or form, to anybody, because we're all demons.

it's not a bad book; peace writes good sentences, but i couldn't tell any of the characters apart and got tired of everybody farting all the time and getting pissed and shat on every ten seconds. no one in this world can ever enjoy anything; if someone by some miracle happened to find a cupcake somewhere and bit into it, it would turn out that it would be made of THE GROUND-UP BONES OF CHILDREN and it would BRUISE THEIR LIPS AND TONGUE A SICKLY PURPLE YELLOW a moment before THEY VOMITED INTO THE PISS-AND-SHIT-FILLED BOWL and PASSED OUT AND DREAMT OF BEING FUCKED IN THE ASS.

Kirsten says

I'm either stupid or this was poorly written, because I have literally no idea what happened in this book. I don't even know who the main character was, really - at one point he's a writer, and then he's confessing to crimes, knocking down doors, raping people (how does that even play into this, I honestly was just so beyond confused at this point that it didn't even phase me), and I don't even know who ended up being the culprit. The thought process was so twisted and disjointed that I honestly didn't know who anyone was at any given point in the book. The amount to which I disliked this book is so disheartening because I had been really excited to read it for years (ever since I found out Andrew Garfield starred in the film/TV adaptation) and now it was such a huge letdown. You know when you're "reading" a book but you're only looking at the words? That was me through this whole book.

This will be the first time I remove things from my To-Read list, and I'm only doing it because I know the other three will be as torturous as this one.
Ugh, so unimpressed right naw.

Dan Schwent says

When a little girl goes missing, crime reporter Eddie Dunford is on the case. Eddie finds a pattern between the girl's disappearance and others. Where will the trail lead and will Eddie have anything left when he gets there?

There's a greasy spoon close to my house that serves something called The Mess, a pile of scrambled eggs, hashbrowns, bacon, sausage, and gravy, a meal that will simultaneously help you achieve Nirvana and hit your life's nadir. That's what this book reminded me of.

Nineteen Seventy-four is a cluster fuck of biblical proportions. Crime reporter Eddie Dunford is in way over his head from day one. In fact, I don't really buy him as a crime reporter seeing as how he's kind of a coward.

The narrative starts a bit slow but is soon bouncing around at ninety miles per hour, zig-zagging like a mouse on a speed. Much like Eddie, I had no clue what was going on a great percentage of the time.

The repetitive style grated on me after a while, making me long for the prose of such crime writers as Lawrence Sanders and George Pelecanos. In fact, Eddie reminds me of a less competent version of Nick Stefanos.

Another thing I wasn't crazy about was all the people with similar names. Also, practically every damn character in the book was in on the crime. I wasn't sure if I actually liked the book while I was reading it and wasn't any more certain by the end.

Nineteen Seventy-four was unique and powerful at times but I can't really say I enjoyed it. I guess we'll call this a 2.

Becky says

If ever there was a book to really make you appreciate how versatile the word "fuck" can be, I think this might be it.

I'm not sure if that's a compliment or not. You'd think it would be, from me, considering that it could be considered a 'get rich quick' scheme for someone to put a swear jar in my vicinity. But my goodness, there were a fucking lot of fucks being said in this book, and I think that, in combination with the slang, it tended to muddy the waters a bit and make it harder to follow conversations. It was a bit hard to follow in general, though, especially when there's apparently an unwritten rule where one never finishes a sentence or question, and one never gives a full answer when a grunt will do.

Not that I'm complaining all that much about it. It's far more realistic this way than if everyone was super forthcoming and just spilled all of their secrets bond villain style. But what did not help at all was the fact that there were so many recycled names. Multiple Clares, one being a young girl who is the catalyst for the story when she goes missing, and the other one being a middle-aged Scottish woman. Multiple Pauls/Paulas, double Barrys and Johns, etc. Basically, what I'm getting at is that, between the reused character names, choppy dialog, the dialect, the slang, and the busy-bee "fuck", I was doing a lot of context guessing and a lot of hoping that things would make sense in the end.

And now you're dying to know: DID things make sense in the end? Umm, kinda. The whodunnit's revealed and whatnot... but it was a bit messy and convoluted, and a little bit out of left field. Like life, I guess. And I'm not even sure if THAT is a complaint, because... well, the structure of the story, and the narrative, are just kind of neurotic and random and always a step behind and confused... so the resolution being that way, while a little frustrating for the reader, does fit.

This story is broken into three parts. Parts one and two felt a lot like build up to me. There were a shitton of strings going in every direction, with our narrator, Eddie, following them rather blindly and not quite knowing what the fuck he's doing, but just feeling like there's something more and that things just aren't quite right, so he keeps digging until he's in over his head. (Well, to be fair, he was in over his head from the start.. but he just didn't know it yet.)

Part three, though. Part three starts with a fucking wrench to the face and then graduates to sledgehammers and keeps hitting. Never having read David Peace before, I wasn't sure how much to trust the narrative style. I mean, it's first person, right? So one naturally assumes that the narrator is going to make it through to the end of the book? Except that a skilled writer who isn't afraid to fuck with the reader's head can get around that... and Peace is one of those, for sure.

Eddie is the kind of character that I just wanted to slap, constantly. He is an inexperienced, weak, idealistic, selfish, dick. He wants to see his name in print, but won't stand up for himself or his story, and let's his senior staff walk all over him. Granted, he does whatever he wants anyway, but I just wanted him to grow a pair. But then the deeper he goes into his investigation, the more... unhinged he becomes. His sort of unraveling is fascinating, in a "Oh shit, where is this going??" kind of way. It was very deftly handled, and he's about as unreliable as they get. Even I didn't trust him... though I WANTED to trust that he was at least being honest with himself and trying to get to the truth, despite his being a totally unstable shitbag.

The investigation into the missing girl goes fucking EVERYWHERE and ties into just about everything. There are, as I mentioned before, a TON of characters, many of them sharing names, and it is hard at times to

keep them straight. So, as I said before, it's something of a mess, though it does all.. mostly, come together in the end. There are a few loose ends though - and these may be tied up throughout the rest of the series... or maybe not and they were just forgotten, or there was some oblique reference to them that I missed or something.

I don't know where I'm going with this review. I can't say that this book was light reading in any sense (content or style), but once it started to pick up, it was hard to put back down, so overall, I enjoyed it quite a lot.

Tfitoby says

A brilliantly bleak British Christmas noir, told first person from the perspective of an ambitious young crime correspondent as he investigates the seemingly related abduction, rape, torture and murder of young girls in Yorkshire in the early 1970s. Set against police and council corruption and the apparent disintegration of British society, Peace weaves a tale based on actual events and loaded with historical references.

Other than his willingness to take the reader in to the darkest reaches of what men are capable of Peace's most remarkable feat is the slow disintegration of the mind of his protagonist represented by a lack of cohesion to his narration the further down the rabbit hole he goes. Often compared to James Ellroy because of his dark subject matter, sentence structure and pop culture references, 1974 is no different, although he is much more literary than Ellroy's staccato sentences can reach and despite Edward Dunford being a little shit of a protagonist I found myself taking a liking to him in a way that I just couldn't ever imagine doing with Ellroy's men.

Paul Bryant says

Blech.

Oh how the crime thriller is a paradoxical conflation
Of the realistic and the bonkers in one tough narration.
Our author requires us to sit back and gape
At his tale of child torture and of course anal rape.

Like every other crime thriller, this packs in as many exact details as possible and he's very good on English life in Leeds in December 1974 – it's gritty, unceasingly unpleasant, and the incessant use of the F word is very authentic in certain areas of English society. But the more the story ploughs on in a relentless James Ellroyish way (David Peace is a big fan) the stupider it gets. I can refer to two big plot items which are not spoilers because they are mentioned in the blurb (watch out, the first one is gruesome).

1. The child killer stitches a pair of real swan wings to his latest 10 year old victim. So when did you ever hear of something outlandish like that happening in the actual world? Never. Leaving aside the fact that it would be physically impossible to do that (the wings would not be able to be sewn, they'd be too heavy), murderers don't have those kind of florid fantasies – or maybe they do, but they don't have the time or the resources to put them into practice. They just want to rape, torture and murder, nothing as fancy as swan's wings.

2. By the end of the book there's a series of child murders but also, within the space of a week, a series of criminal-conspiracy murders of adults – maybe six or seven in total, I may have lost count. A series of murders like that has never happened in Britain. I'm not saying it never could, but it never has so far. Six related execution-style murders in one town in one week? It's off-the-scale ridiculous. Leeds in 1974 was not Ciudad Juárez in 2010.

So you get the realistic surface and the florid conspiracy theory. We can see this in miniature when the hero reporter takes a terrific series of beatings and tortures lasting at least 24 hours (inflicted by a whole stationful of bent coppers), and then is dumped at the side of a road someplace, and then springs back into life and is on the trail of the bad guys as soon as he wakes – and doesn't require the week in hospital to recover. Same thing would happen in Clint Eastwood spaghetti westerns, but there it was all part of the fun. Here, with your gritty realism, it's beyond parody.

I just read James Baldwin's amazing short story "Going to See the Man". There is hair-raising very extreme violence in this story, real violence which you feel in your heart and bones. It's there because it was there in real life. It's not there because you have to crank up the shock value to get through to the jaded.

1974 is a sad indictment of itself and its genre.

Roman Clodia says

For the first time my prayers were not for me but for everyone else, that all of those things in my notebooks, on all of those tapes, in all of those envelopes and bags in my room, that none of them were true, that the dead were alive and the lost were found, and that all of those lives could be lived anew.

Given that 'dark' and 'bleak' are standard adjectives used about contemporary crime fiction, this book stands out not so much for the depictions of viciousness (though they're there) but for the visceral *aura* of violence which overhangs and permeates the text. No-one comes off well: not the anti-hero reporter who puts his life at risk for both the story and his own by-line, not the wives of depraved businessmen, certainly not the police (with one possible exception).

Peace writes with vigour and at a frenetic pace which pushes us through the book at top-speed. There are moments when his prose is almost poetic: the black, depraved poetry of a Baudelaire, dripping with the secretions of the human body. At other times, he's not quite in control: I didn't believe how much of the time our narrator spends crying; and the dreams get over-used even in a narrative which is part nightmare.

Overall, though, a gut-punch of a book that leaves other corruption-and-brutality-in-high-places stories standing.

Trin says

Okay, so. I'm fucking sick of it.

I'm sick of thrillers that burn through female characters like the author is keeping score. None of these women have any agency: they're clearly there to be fucked and beaten and raped and abandoned and called bitches and be mad drooling hags and be violently killed. Oh, except for the one lucky woman who gets to be the hero's mom.

Hero's totally the wrong word, though, of course. Instead of anyone remotely admirable or interesting, we're forced to suffer through this valley of despair and human indecency with some racist, homophobic, misogynistic schmuck who has no interesting character traits outside of what an asshole he is. Great, let's spend 300 pages watching this charmer bumble around investigating a bunch of little girls' brutal murders that turn out to be part of some sort of giant conspiracy of I don't give a fuck. Like, the police, politicians, and businessman are sometimes corrupt and stuff. I'm positive no one has ever used that plot before!

And, sure: I get this is all supposed to be *gritty* and *real*. Whatever. I am so tired of that being used as an excuse for another vile, cynical book that doesn't say anything interesting about humanity other than the fact that the author apparently thinks it fucking sucks. Or at least that the '70s sucked. Except, aside from the protagonist constantly telling us the year (I'm not sure I caught it...is it NINETEEN SEVENTY-FOUR?) and tossing out song references ("Life on Mars" was playing in a pub at one point, and god did it make me wish I was watching that show instead), this book could pretty much take place whenever. It certainly doesn't make any interesting points about how things may or may not have changed in the last 36 years. Just: people are shits, people are shits, people are shits. Thank you, please sexually harass your waitresses.

I can't read any more books like this. These highly-acclaimed thrillers that are blurbed with words like "explosive" and "raw" and that are the equivalent of spending several hours hanging out at the bottom of a cesspit. But how to avoid them? Certainly read fewer thrillers by men; definitely skip anything blurbed by Ian Rankin. And you know what: maybe for a while sidestep thrillers all together.

Anyone got any recommendations for books in which women with swords get to stab a lot of people? For some reason I have a craving.
