



## PopCo

*Scarlett Thomas*

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## **PopCo** Scarlett Thomas

PopCo tells a story of twenty-nine-year-old Alice Butler, a quirky, fiercely intelligent loner with an affinity for secret codes and mathematics. She works for the huge toy company named PopCo, where she creates snoping kids' kits - KidSpy, KidTec and KidCracker. At the company conference Alice and her colleagues are brought into developing the ultimate product for the teenage girls.

## **PopCo Details**

Date : Published 2009 by Canongate Books (first published December 31st 2004)

ISBN : 9781847673350

Author : Scarlett Thomas

Format : Paperback 450 pages

Genre : Fiction, Mystery, Contemporary

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## **From Reader Review PopCo for online ebook**

### **switterbug (Betsey) says**

This is a love it or hate it book. Because of the significant social issues contained in this story, such as the mistreatment of animals, corporate misdeeds, and guerilla marketing, this will appeal more to socially conscious individuals and those whose principles stand in opposition to the current CEO-type establishment. But, even then, counterculture types may still not like it if they don't want to see these issues advanced in a novel. That said, I applaud Scarlett Thomas for weaving these controversies in without sermonizing and laying on dull exposition. Thomas is clearly brainy and imaginative. She is subversive without being cynical, intellectual without condescending.

Two storylines alternate throughout the novel, and eventually merge into a complex whole. As a child, Alice Butler was raised primarily by her grandparents, as her mother died when she was very young and her father took off to find a buried treasure. Alice's grandfather is a formidable cryptanalyst, cracking codes and ciphers and teaching Alice the essentials of prime numbers, poly-alphabetic ciphers, Vigenere enciphering, and other forms of codes and ciphers. The reader is exposed to some fundamental lessons that are thrilling and mind-boggling. The author infuses this in the story so naturally that it feels organically part of the storyline.

Alice's grandmother has been working on the Riemann Hypothesis for many years but has not solved it. Alice's upbringing has made her hyperaware of the layers of complexity that exist in her surroundings, and she is a lover of paradoxes. She is often alienated from her peers, and develops a tough shell due to the immaturity and abuse she endures from her classmates (as well as some teachers). I have never read a book that illuminates adolescent behaviors so well--such as taunting, striving for popularity, the desire to fit in. Not even Margaret Atwood, known for her stark portrayals of teenage predatory behaviors, has illustrated the harrowing anxieties, shame and adversity so baldly and authentically.

As an adult, Alice works for the corporate toy company, PopCo, the third largest toy company in the world. The story opens as Alice is on her way to a "thought camp" retreat. Her job is coming up with marketing strategies aimed at teenage girls. Her team is designated to design a new product, with specific potential to become a craze. Essentially, create a desire where none exists and persuade teenage girls that they have to have it. The ideation seminars at the thought camp instruct PopCo employees to create identity manias, a veritable fever that infects girls and coaxes them to covet a trend and crave a product.

In lesser hands, this could easily become an elongated slogan or a sententious rant. However, Thomas is a gifted writer with a blazing, generous spirit. She is out-of-the-box and brimming with provocative, piercing ideas that are fleshed out and powerful. This imaginative novel is unclassifiable and yet compelling. The author has a keen sense of adventure, keeping the reader in suspense. Alice's narrative voice has a vital, dynamic sensibility that is suffused with compassion and wisdom beyond her years. The prose is eloquent and her characters fully developed. Thomas is an enormous, brilliant think tank of a writer.

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### **Aimee C. says**

Honestly, I picked this book up because the cover looked cool. I'm not above it. And the book turned out to be \*dope\*! It's nice to see a female protagonist who is really smart, kind of geeky, and a bit of a loner, but

who still manages to do things that most people do, like smoke cigarettes, get laid, and be, you know, not socially retarded. Theme-wise, 'PopCo' reminded me a bit of 'Fight Club,' if 'Fight Club' was geared towards British librarians. That sounds really pejorative, but it may, in fact, be the highest compliment I can pay to a book. This book has the anti-consumerist bent, the slightly morbid humor, the impeccable research, and the bizarre-but-dead-on insights that 'Fight Club' has, only instead of a crazy guy who wants to beat the living shit out of people at its center, it has a remarkably lucid girl who likes to crack codes. Or more accurately, ciphers. There is a difference, which is just one of the many random, useless, but awesome bits of information that I learned from this book. I also picked up a recipe for vegan cake.

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### **Sarah says**

I loved this book. It got a little heavy handed at times, toward the end especially, but it sort of had to and it was still just fun and exciting and all around a great read. Someone said it was chicklit for geeky chicks. I don't see the chicklit part, but it was definitely geeky and totally awesome for it. It's packed full of weird cryptanalyst stuff and lectures on math and history (an entire chapter is dedicated to the life story of some presumably made up dude from the 1600's), but it's all written in a totally accessible way that made it fun to read.

I can definitely see someone getting super bored by the details, but there are also a few unexpected turns in the book that add to the fun factor. So even if you don't understand all the math and codes, I think it still has a lot of levels to it.

Anyway, as I said I loved it. I've learned so much bizarre stuff from this book.. some I guess I already knew from my enjoyment of math growing up, but it was just a fun refresher and a fun tie in. I guess that's the geeky part, to which I embrace willingly and enthusiastically...

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### **Blair says**

This is the third book I've read by Scarlett Thomas, who is quickly becoming one of my favourite modern authors. I was introduced to her books by *The End of Mr. Y* (very, very good) and recently read her latest novel *Our Tragic Universe* (absolutely brilliant). *PopCo* came before both, originally published in 2004 and repackaged after the success of *Mr. Y*. I have to confess that I knew of the author before her most recent books, and I think I'd even looked at an earlier version of *PopCo* and rejected it - the very late-90s-style, brightly coloured covers of Thomas's previous works led me to believe they were either chick-lit in the 'ladette' mould or some kind of slightly more grown-up YA novels (my local library's copy of *PopCo* has a cover featuring a woman's heavily made-up eyes and lips - god only knows why, as this has nothing whatsoever to do with the content). I quite literally judged her books by their covers, and am beginning to realise this was a huge mistake. I'm now trying to make up for it - I'm attempting to get hold of the earlier ones as we speak - but in any case, *PopCo* turned out to be excellent.

Having read three of Thomas's novels, I've started to notice patterns in the stories they tell. They all have flawed and kind of neurotic, but really likeable and believable, female protagonists; they're all full of big ideas - this one has lots of stuff about complex mathematics and code-breaking - presented in an accessible way; they all have a central mystery, but they're really about much more than that, about people,

relationships and life itself. *PopCo* is ostensibly about Alice Butler and the mysterious coded messages she receives while on a company retreat, with flashbacks to her somewhat troubled childhood, but there's a lot more to it than that. It's a record of Alice's thoughts about her career, relationships/sex and friendships - particularly the titular toy corporation (which she works for), the ethical implications of marketing products to children, and the dilemma of choosing between the boss she fantasises about and the new colleague who desires her. Even the young Alice, in flashbacks, ruminates on the difficulties of 'fitting in' (providing several laugh-out-loud moments as she strives not to be labelled a 'gyppo', 'slag' or 'weirdo' by her new, cooler friends) and the mysteries contained within her own family. This all cleverly links back in with the adult Alice's attempts to develop a new must-have toy for teenage girls and the moral battles she has with herself as a result.

If there's anything wrong with this book, it's that Alice's over-analysing and questioning of everything can be a little too much at times. This didn't bother me much as I really liked and in many ways related to the character, but I can see it being off-putting for some other readers. There are also points when the flashbacks, many of which involve Alice learning about maths and cryptography from her grandparents, just seem like a device to simplify these details by approaching them from a child's perspective (a lot of them still didn't make sense to me, to be honest, but you don't need to fully understand all the concepts discussed to 'get' what actually happens in the story). My final complaint is that I really wanted to see Alice with Georges, not Ben! But the relationships Thomas's characters have are nothing if not realistic, and it's fitting that Alice should end up in a believable, imperfect relationship rather than the fantasy option.

It's funny that *Mr. Y* was the book that introduced me to Thomas, as it's turned out to be my least favourite of the three I've read so far. Her novels always seem to make me have the same reactions; I wish I was best friends with her characters, I envy the conversations they have with one another, and I wonder where/how I can meet people like these, if they even exist! *PopCo* is a fantastic, ambitious, thought-provoking book (the conclusion certainly got me thinking about the concept of corporate sabotage from the inside, for a start) and well worth a read.

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## **Kali says**

I did enjoy this book. I thought I should make that clear now, because I mostly want to rant about it.

Thomas used homoeopathy as a plot device in *The End of Mister Y*. Okay, that's fine, you get one magical freebie. However, when it showed up here in *PopCo*, I realised; *Oh...you really believe this, don't you?*

There are also severe problems with Thomas' representations of veganism and activism. At one point, a character destroys a *PopCo* product in a toy store, as a passive-aggressive way of punishing the company. Thomas didn't seem to realise that *PopCo* would not lose money on the item - the toy store would. The character's edgy, daring, stick-it-to-the-man vandalism was simply the act of a ignorant, selfish, immature something or other. The same when a vegan character recommended destroying eggs. Why would a vegan destroy eggs? It just means that the store will need to buy more! It harms animals, and does absolutely nothing to the companies they are 'protesting' against. It contradicts the character's own stated morals, *and*, as a real-life vegan, annoyed me. Quite a lot.

In short, things like this make Thomas' characters come across as ignorant, childish, hypocrites, which severely ruined my enjoyment of the book. The story is fine, it's interesting, it's absorbing, and I liked the codes. I just wanted to smack the stupid out of a lot of the characters.

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## Amy says

This book is about a girl, a necklace and some buried treasure.

But it is also about a worldwide toy company, cryptoanalysis and the creation of ideas. It's about the factorisation of prime numbers, the mass production of milk and the obsessions of teenage girls. It's about rubbish parents and loving grandparents. It's about the Voynich manuscript, paradoxes, crossword puzzles, corporate bullshit, cricket, World War 2, games of logic, Gödel's Theorem of Incompleteness, virtual worlds, miso soup, probability, the Vigenère square, 18th century pirates, mass marketing, the intrinsic value in being cool, letters written in code, transfinity, bird sanctuaries and that awful time when people were wearing skirts over trousers.

It's about what animals you'd see if you were camping in a suburban garden, which homeopathic remedy you should take if you felt like you were made of glass and why you should always change your mind when choosing a surprise prize on a game show.

It's about obsession, greed, love, creativity and a secret kept for twenty years. It's about doing no harm and stopping others from doing harm. And it's brilliant.

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## La.Silbia says

Disclaimer: questo libro fa emergere la cretina che c'è in me, per qualche strana ragione; la recensione sarà dunque viziata da ciò. Il che è solo un modo elegante per dire che sarò lievemente (e simpaticamente) polemica, e visto che la polemica ce l'ho nel sangue, sarò anche prolissa. Mi scuso.

Prendete una puntata tipo della Signora in giallo. Va bene anche qualsiasi telefilm del genere, ma io sono una fan di Jessica, Jessica über alles! Nella mia mente una puntata tipo della signora in giallo si conclude con un trio: Jessica, il colpevole, e uno sfigato qualunque che si trova in scena solo come espediente narrativo. Jessica scopre abilmente il colpevole, perché lei è intelligente e astutissima, pessima da avere come zia o amica da invitare a casa vostra però, perché immancabilmente finirete o morti o accusati. Dicevamo, Jessica smaschera il colpevole, e prontamente svela anche al colpevole stesso, nonché allo sfigato di turno (duole dirlo, ma spesso costui è lo sceriffo), il piano diabolico nei minimi dettagli. Jessica sa, il colpevole pure, il terzo dunque serve solo a giustificare il fatto che lo stiano spiegando. Ecco, io ho sempre cordialmente detestato queste scenette, e non manco mai di farne oggetto delle mie polemiche acide. Sì, sono una persona simpaticissima, I know.

Tutto questo per dire che la Scarlett Thomas è un'autrice che mi è tanto simpatica, è tanto cara e si vede anche acculturata, nonché attenta nel descrivere con cognizione ciò di cui parla, ma a tratti sembra prendere per fessi i propri lettori. Come se dovesse spiegare proprio tutto-tutto-tutto. Esempio? La protagonista per sua stessa ammissione ha giocato a videogiochi e giochi di ruolo virtuali...come può essere mai possibile che, in una conversazione, chieda al suo amico informatico cosa è un avatar, e che lui glielo spieghi con un linguaggio svilente? Cara Scarlett, non mi sento presa per fessa perché hai sentito il bisogno di spiegarmelo, ma perché pensi che io non possa capire che è inverosimile che parlino in quel modo.

Anche tutte le pagine a parlare dei vari tipi di crittografia! Scarlett, tesoro mio, se ho voglia di approfondire mi faccio una ricerca su google, di certo quando hai scritto questo libro non ti era molto chiaro come tenere il

lettore con il fiato sospeso. Almeno Jessica in cinque minuti spiega tutto, tu sbrodoli invece per pagine e pagine (e pagine! tante!), come inserendo tanti saggi all'interno di un romanzo.

La protagonista deve presenziare ad un seminario su un tal argomento? E noi lettori presenziamo insieme a lei, subendo - giustamente, mica possiamo essere così scortesi da non starle vicini, eh - insieme a lei una lunga agonia, perché se il seminario fittizio dura mezz'ora, noi realmente impieghiamo mezz'ora a leggere. Se siete me poi aggiungete cinque minuti buoni spalmati nella mezz'ora per qualche parolaccia gratuita qua e là. Perché ho provato sincero odio per i personaggi che facevano domande al fittizio relatore, come quando all'università il professore sta per dichiarare finita la lezione interminabile del venerdì pomeriggio e si vede un ditino alzarsi accompagnato da uno "scuuusiiii?". C'è da dire che la capacità di trasportare il lettore nella scena l'autrice la dimostra. Peccato che sia straziante.

Risultato? Accantonato. Il fulcro della storia poteva anche intrigarmi, peccato che a metà libro (cioè dopo 240 benedette pagine cartacee, duecentoquaranta!) il fulcro lo vedo solo in lontananza. Vorrei tanto continuarlo perché sento che prima o poi ci sarà qualcosa di buono, perché la protagonista mi è simpatica, perché non è del tutto male, e altri perché, ma l'idea di dover superare altre duecentoquaranta pagine così non mi alletta.

Ci sono tanti altri libri che meritano il mio tempo, questo sinceramente ora no.

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## **Harry McKinley says**

PopCo is simply the best kind of book; Absorbing, thought provoking and ultimately enriching.

Charting the almost fantastical experiences of Alice, a social opt-out in the last vestiges of youth, as she plunders the inner depths of her own conscience and character to find her place in the world, it is a story so rich with spirit that one can't help but be totally drawn in.

The plot is straightforward but always engaging as Thomas weaves the narrative in a non-linear way, dishing out just enough tidbits to keep you hungry for the next chapter. The most exciting literature is that which seeps fluidly into one's own life, sparking interests and creating questions. PopCo does this entirely and I found myself rapt in an altogether surprising preoccupation with the world of mathematics and the genius' that lie therein. Of course it was Thomas' critical and creative connection with this material that made it so immersing and by posing greater questions, taking theory and expanding it's relevance to a universal scale, that made it not only relevant but accessible.

I have to admit throughout I was expecting a more action orientated plot, constantly waiting for the anonymous notes and secret locket to amount to a tale of Dan Brown proportions but in fact it is more subtle than that. It is a contemplative exploration of one woman's extraordinary life and through this life we are exposed to themes which challenge and provoke. Everything from the nature of consumerist society, which Alice finally rebels against, to the ethics of animal farming, the rights of foreign workers and the authenticity of individuality are touched upon and we, as the readers, are forced to consider our own perceptions and our own role in society head on. Are we simply pawns in a culture afraid to ask questions? Do we already know the answers but are happier to shy away from unglamorous, awkward truths?

It is in the realisation of Alice that the novel holds another of its great hooks. Thomas demonstrates an unnerving understanding of the minutiae of human character and the protagonist remains utterly real, believable and relatable from beginning to end. The sections where the narrative jumps back to Alice's adolescent years are so vividly exact and genuine it makes one remember exactly the complex minefield of

emotions and social warfare these years were for every individual. She captures it so precisely that one would believe at these times writing she inhabits the body and soul of a 12 year old girl.

Overall Thomas understands the human condition and conveys this in a way that is absorbing and touching. More than this however her writing is intelligent and considered and most importantly the story is captivating and massively entertaining. A great read.

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### **Alexandria says**

This is a pretty terrible book, somewhere between the DaVinci Code and a Babysitter's Club Camp Mohawk Super Special. It's not entirely unreadable and in 571 pages has maybe 4 to 5 good lines. Plot lines never line up together, gratuitous dialogue which is only meant to give exposition, and an unhealthy obsession with the amount of fantastic food the heroine can get are wearying. I only finished the book because I've been trying to finish every book I start this year.

The writing is almost unforgivably bad in parts, as if the author didn't have an editor. I would go look up the line but I don't want to, anyhow, there's a portion that says something like "The landscape changed abruptly. And I say abruptly, because the change was abrupt."

The puzzles are uninteresting, the characters dull, the plot line unconvincing, and the overall movement contrived. Easy pass.

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### **Jo says**

Sheer bloody-mindedness, and disliking not finishing a book, made me trundle through this 400+ page steaming pile of egregious nonsense. It sounds promising, the concept is interesting, I have a vague interest in codes and there is always a slight creepiness to children's toymaking. How wrong I was.

Let's start with the main character. This woman is an uber hipster - can't possibly do anything that anyone anywhere might see as 'cool', but to the point where it actually stops her doing things. The first ~100 pages are just wandering drivel, with what the author assumes is poetic literary prose but what actually comes out is just boring meanderings of a mind that we don't care about.

Once you hit the 150 mark a few interesting things happen, and I'll admit that I got into the story for about 50 pages. It's about trying to think like a teenager, Alice is hearing children playing when there are no children nearby, some interesting people turn up. But that 50 pages quickly descends back into nonsense and you're lost again. Some of the dialogue is so contrived it's unbelievable, characters are laughable caricatures, and yet this 'extreme' world is watered down into nothingness by exploring Alice's childhood, or pages are devoted to discussing how a particular code works. I get maybe explaining a code briefly, but don't give me a mathematical lecture on it.

So when you have a plot that goes nowhere and a main character who is insufferable, the only way that this could get any better is if you start to get the moral high ground shoved down your throat. Not only should you be vegan, you should practice homeopathy and not be pressured into conforming by advertising and huge corporate companies. If these were character traits that were mentioned in passing it would be fine, but



by the time you read the third description of why pharmaceutical companies are the devil, you realise that the author *actually believes in this stuff*. Reading some other comments, apparently all of Thomas' characters in all of her books have some element of homeopathic treatment and it magically works. Not all of your characters should mirror your beliefs in the exact same way, it's lazy.

Really, and I think this was the main problem, this is a book about three different things. You have Alice as a child, solving puzzles with her Grandparents and working out what this necklace may mean. Then you have her work with PopCo trying to develop products and this creepy place they've been sent to. Thirdly you have an introspective look at Alice as a person, with lots of stream-of-conscious-like passages where not much makes sense but you get a good feeling for who Alice is and what motivates her, concerns her etc. If Thomas had chosen one of these paths and run with it she may have come out with a half decent book (though she needs to work on her dialogue).

Sorry Cat, I know you enjoyed it, but I never want to see it's alluring blue pages ever again.

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### **Eli Brooke says**

I read this after reading Thomas' more recent novel "The End of Mr. Y", which I adored. I actually think that PopCo works better as a cohesive whole, and I enjoyed it quite a bit, though it didn't have quite the same resonance with me in terms of having a specific set of ideas I was excited to read about as Mr. Y did. I definitely recommend this one to others, though. It's got a very strong anti-commercialist, anti-herd-mentality, anti-fashion-in-all-aspects-of-life bent, and that's very good. Plus it's got puzzles and mathematical theory packaged into a really engaging and readable narrative.

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### **David says**

My earlier review of this book was unduly vicious. I've revised it slightly below and taken Popco off the "utter dreck" shelf. Unfortunately, for this book at least, she still gets stuck with the 'intellectual con artist' label.

Scarlett Thomas is the author of "The End of Mr Y", an impressive book which was highly original and quite entertaining. So I had high hopes for "Popco". Unfortunately, this time it seems that Ms Thomas may have bitten off more than she could chew. The discipline that was evident throughout the tightly constructed "The end of Mr Y" is sorely missing here - one senses early on that things are spiralling out of the author's control.

This is an ambitious, but also a profoundly irritating, book. The author clearly has a point to make, but does so in a fashion that manages to be both preachy and clumsy. There's a lot of faux-erudition, the parading of little tidbits of knowledge for no particular reason. But the author fails the basic requirements of the writer's trade -- she doesn't tell a credible story, and her habit of breaking off the narrative to include assorted heavy-handed, poorly thought out, mini-lectures on everything from prime factorization to networking is disruptive and pointless. These various digressions do not move the plot forward, and ultimately lead nowhere - the account of how the final code is cracked is presented at such a sketchy level of detail that the reader simply has to take it as a given - so why all the little lessons in codebreaking along the way?

Ultimately, the book just collapses under the weight of the various digressions, whose relevance is never really made clear.

Better accounts of some of the topics dragged into this book can be found in:

Simon Singh's "The Code Book"

Naomi Klein's "No Logo"

Malcolm Gladwell's "The Tipping Point"

A more successful synthesis of some of the ideas, incorporated in a skillfully told story is in Neal Stevenson's "Cryptonomicon".

But give this book a miss. Hopefully Ms. Thomas will regain her earlier form next time out.

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## **Anita Dalton says**

*PopCo* by Scarlett Thomas is one of those books that is a revelation. Every now and then, I come across a book wherein I know the author's ideas and beliefs line up so well with mine that it is very nearly eerie. *PopCo* encapsulated so many of my own thoughts that I likely annoyed everyone around me as I recommended this book to one and all, even going so far as to purchase several copies at a book clearance store so I could give copies away.

*PopCo* is hard to categorize. While the heroine, a certain Alice Butler, solves two mysteries, she also contemplates veganism and the ethics of marketing to children. She discusses her knowledge of homeopathic medicine, crossword puzzles, high level math, cryptography and cryptanalysis, and the Voynich Manuscript. Her attempts at developing her own identity ring truer to me than any other coming-of-age descriptions in recent memory. And far from finding her childhood with her grandparents boring, I wondered what I would be like had I been raised by genius, eccentric grandparents, and found the prospect attractive. Alice has within her head the Vigenère square, Gödel's code and prime factorization in the same manner as I have the world's best chocolate chip cookie recipe memorized. Alice is self-contained, cool under pressure, utterly geeky and wholly earnest – in short, a heroine unlike anyone I have ever read before. Read my entire discussion [here](#).

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## **Eileen says**

*PopCo* kind of wants to be *Cryptonomicon*, but shorter and with less discussion of math, types of economies, and anything else more complex than marketing. It makes me want never to work at any company larger or more corporate than a shoebox. That's kind of the point of the book; it ends up literally saying so. The end was really annoying, due to aforementioned flat moralization plus a boring/not particularly believable solution to the main mystery. The rest of the story was all right, though nothing special. My main problem is that though I agree with the sentiment of the book, I find the execution too shoddy. I really wanted to like it, but came out disappointed.

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## Kelly V says

This was really an awesome and exciting book. I couldn't really name what kind of book this is, as it interweaves so many topics (and well) that it's unbelievable. Foundational themes include cryptanalysis and marketing, but the author also touches on several other interesting areas, including 17th-century pirates, artificial intelligence, pattern recognition, virtual worlds, gaming, mathematics in general, and British schoolgirl life in the 80s. I loved the nod that Bletchley Park got, as I worked on a project there during my time in England.

As you might imagine, the story is kind of unusual for bringing all of these things together in a coherent way. The basic premise is that Alice Butler works for PopCo, an internationally successful toy company. She was brought into a long-term focus group that was supposed to come up with a Big Idea relating to a specific demographic that the company has trouble selling to. The group is staying at an isolated estate, cut off from the Internet and any other non-PopCo-related media. They go to all these seminars and mingle with each other and so on. While she's there, Alice is getting mysterious encoded messages from some unknown person. The book sleeve made it sound like this was a huge part of the story, but really it's not, at least until the end. A bigger part of the story is her relationship with the people at the estate and the tale of her childhood, right after her father abandoned her. The other constant theme is marketing, marketing, marketing.

One of the things that's interesting about the book is that before you read it, you are given the impression that PopCo is sinister or evil. But in reality it's not really different from any other company, as it's just a normal company with normal, aggressive marketing tactics. People sometimes forget that with capitalism, the number one goal is for the individual to make as much money as possible, without consideration for the safety/sanity of others. And companies are just collections of individuals. These ideas come out in the end of the book.

I do have two slightly negative things to say about the book. First, it was a really slow read for me. I can't say exactly why, but it took a long time for me to get into it, even though I found it interesting. And even then, my reading pace didn't really speed up like it normally does. I read that Thomas is part of a group of writers who intentionally write in a very simple, straightforward manner. Personally, I think a little embellishment doesn't do any harm and sometimes can really move things along. The other thing is that I do have to admit that the ending did disappoint me just a little. It was just a bit of a let-down, as it didn't stand up to the rest of the book somehow. I just expected something more impressive. But I still thought it was great, overall. So read it but be forewarned.

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