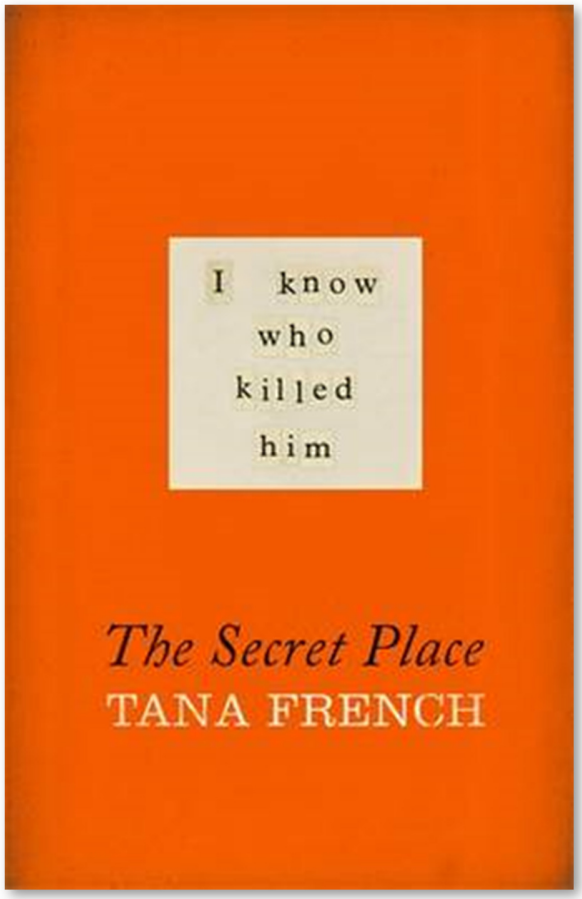
Lovereading Reader reviews of The Secret Place by Tana French

Below are the complete reviews, written by Lovereading members.



Peter Land

A gripping story of relationships - and murder - brilliantly told.

In the grounds of an upmarket girls school, a young man was murdered and a year later the crime remains unsolved. Then on a noticeboard provided for confidential messages, there is posted a note in which one girl claims to know who did it. This brings the police back into the school in the form of a new partnership of two detectives, one experienced female and one younger male colleague and over the course of a day, the case is solved. A simple tale and brilliantly told, at a good pace; this is a longish book but certainly didn't feel it. During the course of that day, the relationship and partnership between the two detectives develops, we learn the nature of the friendships and rivalries of the girls themselves, the deep emotions that they wrestle with and the loyalty they have to each other.

The story is told through several voices, principally the adult detectives and the teenage girls and the contrasts are vivid and the styles authentic. In addition to the age gap, class jealousies come into play and the reader has to consider whether it is relevant to the original crime. Characterisation is strong, I really felt that I got to know all the principle players but the solution when revealed still came as a surprise.

This is the first Tara French book I have read, but it gripped me from start to finish and I shall certainly now seek out her others.

Suzanne Marsh - www.ireadnovels.wordpress.com

'The Secret Place' by Tana French is knocking on all doors to all readers that love reading crime books saying Read Me!

Holly from St Kilda private girls school has something to give Detective Stephen evidence from her schools secret place notice board. Holly hands Stephen a card with a photo of Christopher Harper and a note cut out of a book spaced wide like a ransom note saying I know who killed him. Someone who may know who killed Chris put this on the secret place school notice board, but who and why?

Chris Harper who was a very popular boy at St Colm's, was found dead. All the girls at St Kilda fancied the gorgeous Chris with his glossy brown boy band hair style and Chris fancied a lot of girls. There was no reason why anyone would want to kill Chris Harper.

Detective Antionette Conway and Detective Stephen Moran visit St Kilda school and interview the girls one by one to find out which one the girls put this ransom note on the secret place notice board.

I love the young girls sarcastic vocabulary to their answers to Detective Stephen Moran when interviewing them. It's like OMG Tana French has the young girls speech to a perfect T. All the characters of all the girls love or hate them they have all been made just like young girls you would know and identify with. I can honestly say that all the girls are a joy to read about with lots of laugh out loud moments coming your way.

'The Secret Place' everyone is talking about it, crime writers, Tana fans, bloggers, reading groups, online and social media.

I am sure this fifth book by Tana French will climb high in the ratings on book websites and will be displayed in book shop windows.

All crime readers pin to your notice board a reminder to order 'The Secret Place' 28.08.2014

Sienna Logan - @losttobooks

I didn't expect to enjoy this book as much as I did. It exceeded all of my expectations and I struggled to put it down. *It's not my usual read but I don't think it'll be the last book by this author.*

Okay, so I will admit that this book is not my usual genre and I have never heard of Tana French before. This is the first book I've read by her and I did

consider it a risk. When I saw it come in the post, I was starting to question whether it was a risk worth taking due to the length of the book. It was a huge paperback (512 pages) and I didn't even know whether it was for me. Saying that though, this book shocked me in more ways than one.

Firstly, I was surprised to find that most of the characters were teens. I had forgotten the blurb when I received a copy so from previous experiences, I was expecting adult characters. This came as a pleasant surprise, and although their language did "like totes" annoy me, due to stereotypes feeling unrealistic and overused, the book felt closer to my age than I expected.

Also, I was surprised by how hard it was to stop reading. I didn't think I'd become as engaged in the story as I did, but the book kept me turning pages right up until the end. The mystery and the way everything linked together was crafted beautifully so that the narrative flowed seamlessly and I liked the way the present was broken up with the past so that it gave plenty of characters a motive.

Overall, I didn't expect to enjoy this book as much as I did. It exceeded all of my expectations and I did struggle to put it down. It's not my usual genre but I don't think it'll be the last Tana French book I read.

Megan Abbott

Unsolved murder, exclusive boarding school, lies, mystery. A good who done it!

I really anticipated reading this book, 'The Secret Place' by Tana French, as I love mystery novels. I will admit that it did take some time to get hooked but as soon as I did I was not disappointed. The book starts off with " I know who killed him" being posted on a notice board in an exclusive girls boarding school, which leads to Detective Stephen Moran investigating the story of a boy whose murder has been unsolved for a year. Until now!

This gripping novel will appeal to any adults that love a good spine tingling mystery. I do think this book will appeal to teenagers, however some of the slang I didn't understand but that just could be because of my age. I really enjoyed the fact that the story was told from two different perspectives: one of 4 teenage girls and the other from the detective. This shows the different feelings towards murder from different age groups. I would recommend this book and overall I enjoyed it.

Angela Rhodes

Wow! I know who did it! This has to be the most enticing 'Who dun it' I have read this year! *A boarding school, the popular girls, the geeks and the misfits, throw into the mix the boys from Colm, a feisty female detective, a nice male detective, a murder and a card saying "I know who did it" and you are in for the best read of summer. Your coffee will go cold, you will read into the early hours, lose track of time, while you frantically turn the pages, trying to solve the crime. It will grip you, and pull you along, the dialogue is excellent, the banter between the two cops is perfect. It will have you holding your breath, thinking you have cracked it, just to realise you haven't, loved it! It deserves to be top of the charts!*

Sarah Pybus - @PybusTrans

I was expecting more of a straightforward thriller. What I got was something much more interesting and involving.

I have to admit that based on the premise – a cold case detective trying to get his break with the murder squad by solving something they couldn't – I was expecting more of a straightforward thriller, something in the vein of Patricia Cornwell. What I got was something much more interesting and involving. While there is of course an element of suspense as we try to identify the culprit, there is a strong psychological angle to the story as well.

The novel switches between the perspectives of Detective Stephen Moran (from the present, trying to figure out the past) and the teenage girls he is investigating (beginning more than one year before and slowly revealing the events leading up to the unsolved murder). The two sections have distinctive voices and I found the teenage voices to be very well realised. It's a while since I was a teenager, but French's descriptions took me back to how painful growing up can be and how it tests friendships you thought would be forever – as well as how awful teenage girls can be to each other.

I've never read anything by Tana French before, but based on this I'll definitely be looking up her other novels.

Rachel Hall

This is a splendid novel, combining all the best elements of truly masterful crime fiction and has the potential to become the most talked about book of the summer. *It is a pacy, edge of the seat murder*

inquiry, full of suspense, with the investigation all taking place on a single day.

Detective Stephen Moran is looking to get a foot in the door of the Murder Squad having previously found that his face and background doesn't fit - he is young, ambitious and keen to prove himself. His chance arrives in the form of sixteen year old Holly Mackey a young girl whom he previously encountered when she was nine year old witness testifying in a previous case he worked on. His rapport with her leads her to bring him what could prove to be a critical piece of evidence in solving the murder of a teenage boy, Christopher Harper, from the neighbouring school to her own a year ago. In order to do so, he must work with the lead investigator on this case - Antoinette Conway, a no nonsense, abrasive character. It is the portrayal of this relationship and how it develops which helps to makes this novel so fascinating.

With flashbacks to the period before Chris is killed, the constant reminders of how long he has left to live really serve to keep you captivated. Tana French has done a marvelous job in depicting teenage girls - from how they speak, right through to how different cliques interact with each other. The tensions between Holly Mackey's clan and the "cool" gang are pivotal and their interactions make for fascinating, utterly believable, reading.

Each and every character is well developed which ensures the story flies by, even at over 500 pages. Having previously not read any of Tana French's books, I was unsure about this novel. Although it does feature characters who previously appeared in her third novel, Faithful Place, this is largely irrelevant and this book can be enjoyed as a purely standalone novel. I urge any crime readers to try this novel and lose themselves in this magnificently plotted storyline.

Rachael Anderson

A lengthy, intricate crime novel. Intense and captivating; it kept me entertained until its final pages.

I have never read any crime novels by Tana French and had not heard much about her. In other words I came to this novel without any expectations. It was absolutely brilliant and I will definitely be looking out for other works by her.

The novel centres around a murder connected to St Kilda's, a girls' boarding school in Ireland. Detective Monroe is given a photograph and a written message "I know who killed him" by Holly, one of the girls from the school. It had been put in "The Secret Place", a special noticeboard where the girls pinned

up their secrets without their identity being known. Conway is partnered with Detective Antoinette Conway in order to unravel this murder mystery. Both the characters of Monroe and Conway, are complex and well thought out characters.

Slowly, we learn how and why the murder was committed. French captures teenage angst and culture perfectly in her exploration of friendship and loyalty taken to an extreme level. An intelligent crime novel, one which I thoroughly enjoyed.

Nicola Kingswell

A brilliant page-turner of a thriller combining a coming of age novel with a great who-dunnit.

I really enjoyed 'The Secret Place' by Tana French. The book follows the investigation of a murder of a schoolboy that occurred a year ago, taking place all in one day, with flash backs to the past. I thought all the characters were believable and real, and took me back to high school in an instance. It is a mixture of Donna Tartt's A Secret History, mixed with the Craft, Mean Girls and a dollop of a detective story all rolled into one. It was very cleverly written. I thought a better title would have been the tag line of "I know who killed him" but 'The Secret Place' is clever. Not just the name of the school notice board, but alluding to the cypress clearing, all the nooks and crannies in the boarding school, the mobile phones, elicit rendezvous and all the spaces in the girls bodies and heads. Ultimately this is a novel of adolescence and the transition into adulthood, marred by a tragedy, but I like how the grown up world of the police station mirrored the current lives of the teenagers, showing that bullies and appearances and the need to fit in, belong and have friends follows us all our lives. A brilliant page-turner of a thriller. I know who killed him.

Sarah Harper

A fantastically well written novel. The characters were phenomenal and the development of the story was very clever. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Expertly composed, 'The Secret Place' takes the simple crime novel to a whole new level. It's not my usual genre of choice, and therefore I don't have a great wealth of experience, but in my opinion this book certainly lives up to it's hype. The story was a slow burn, building momentum as it progressed, but just when

you thought everything was pointing in one direction a whole new path would open up. It kept me guessing about all aspects of the crime, right up to the very end. A year ago Chris Harper, a popular teenage boy, was murdered in the grounds of St. Kilda's girls school. The killer was never caught. Now someone has posted a note on The Secret Place, an anonymous school notice board, stating that they know who killed him. Detective Stephen Moran is pulled in to help solve the crime. Moran is trying to claw his way out of Cold Cases and into the Murder Squad and this could be his big break but it's complicated. He needs to partner the prickly Detective Antoinette Conway who worked the original case a year previously. They circle edgily around each other and have to work hard to establish what's going on in the school. The pupils are manipulative and complex, there's a creepy, other worldly feel to the place and they only have a day to find the killer before the girl's parents and lawyers get involved and the pupils stop talking.

A fantastically well written novel. The style of prose took me a while to get used to but the insight into the characters was phenomenal and the development of the story, giving you just a little more information at each turn, was very clever. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Charlotte Connolly

Another great mystery/thriller from Tana French not my favorite though!

I'll start off by saying that Tana French is one of my favorite authors and I have loved all of her previous books so I had very high hopes for 'The Secret Place'.

In this book Stephen Moran, who was in 'Faithful place', is our main detective and he is joined by Detective Antoinette Conway, a new addition to the Dublin murder squad series, to investigate the suspicious death of a teenage boy at an all girls boarding school.

Holly and Frank Mackey also feature.

The story is told in alternating chapters between Stephens's point of view when he starts investigating and flashbacks to the past leading up to the time the crime was committed.

What I love about Tana Frenchs writing is that I feel like she gets people and that comes across in her writing as really believable characters and the situations in the books, although not your typical crimes, are believable in the way she presents them.

In all previous books I have really liked the detectives and I feel like the reason I

probably didn't like this one as much was because I didn't connect with the two detectives in this case but that being said I did like the book I was just spoiled because I liked her previous books so much!

Not your typical whodunnit 'The Secret Place' is a very readable people orientated mystery and I would recommend it and Tana French's previous books to anyone who likes clever suspenseful stories.

Debbie Patrick

I know who killed him

The photo on the card shows a boy who was found murdered, a year ago, on the grounds of a girls' boarding school in the leafy suburbs of Dublin. The caption says 'I KNOW WHO KILLED HIM'.

Detective Stephen Moran has been waiting for his chance to get a foot in the door of Dublin's Murder Squad—and one morning, sixteen-year-old Holly Mackey brings him this photo. 'The Secret Place', a board where the girls at St. Kilda's School can pin up their secrets anonymously, is normally a mishmash of gossip and covert cruelty, but today someone has used it to reignite the stalled investigation into the murder of handsome, popular Chris Harper. Stephen joins forces with the abrasive Detective Antoinette Conway to find out who and why.

But everything they discover leads them back to Holly's close-knit group of friends and their fierce enemies, a rival clique—and to the tangled web of relationships that bound all the girls to Chris Harper. Every step in their direction turns up the pressure. Antoinette Conway is already suspicious of Stephen's links to the Mackey family. St. Kilda's will go a long way to keep murder outside their walls. Holly's father, Detective Frank Mackey, is circling, ready to pounce if any of the new evidence points toward his daughter. And ***the private underworld of teenage girls can be more mysterious and more dangerous than either of the detectives imagined****.*

Jayne Burton

A surprising read. 'I know who killed him'!!

This is the first Tana French book I have read and from the synopsis was expecting a straightforward crime thriller along the lines of Patricia Cornwell who I read a lot. Seeing the size of the book when it arrived, I began to realise

there must be more to it - and there was.

Complex and intricate story of life and relationships at St Kildas, a girl's boarding school, following the murder of a boy from St Colms, the neighbouring boy's boarding school the previous year. It begins in the present, but with flashbacks to months, weeks, days leading up to the murder. No major clues are given as to who committed the murder or why and this aspect just keeps you reading. The relationship and banter between Detective Stephen Moran (currently working in Cold Cases but with an eye on the Murder Squad) and Detective Antoinette Conway of the Murder Squad is well thought out and makes them very real.

Will look out for her books again and highly recommend this one.

Sharon Matthews

A photo and a few words on a notice board sparks a mystery.

A well written story about a few words on a notice board that relates to an unsolved year old murder and one detective's determination to solve the riddle and move up the career ladder as a result. There was a lot of background information and scene setting involved to keep you guessing who had killed Chris Harper and the motives for doing so - everyone seemed to have a reason for wanting to kill him. ***Now that I've finished, I know who killed him - read the book for yourself and find out!***

Phylippa Smithson

I do not remember enjoying a murder-mystery quite as much as this one for an absolute age.

The murder of a private school-boy, ChrisHarper, 12 months before on the grounds of the all girls private school was never solved. However, when, Holly, a pupil at the all girls school, presents 'Cold Case' police officer, Moran, with a card on which is written a claim that the writer knows who killed Chris, the crime is once again brought into life.

Moran is an ambitious police officer and sees an opportunity to progress into the Murder squad as a result of the windfall brought to him by Holly and so goes in person to report the card to the head of the murder team who led the investigation, Conway.

The story then runs parallel between Moran and Conway's investigation on the

premises of the private girls' school in the current time period and then flashes back to the group of girls who are the focus of their investigation. Julia, Holly, Selena and Becca form one clique. Joanna, Gemma, Orla and Alison form the other. Arch rivals but one of them knows who killed Chris Harper.

A fantastic who dunnit. Remarkably faced-paced delivery. And absolutely gutted to have got to the end. I wanted the answer but I did not want my pleasure to end. *Thanks Tana. Here's to your next one.*