

Lovereading Reader reviews of A Song for the Dying by Stuart MacBride

Below are the complete reviews, written by Lovereading members.

Arlene Davidson

Dark, violent, gripping- mixed with the typical MacBride humour! Brilliant!

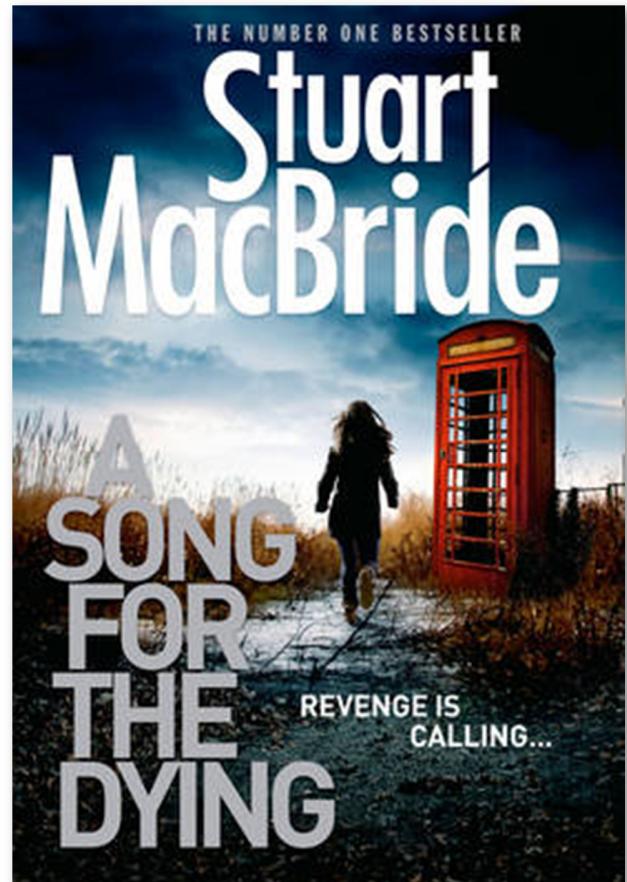
DI Ash Henderson, is released from prison to help investigate "The Inside Man" - a particularly gruesome individual who is maiming women by slitting open their stomachs then stitching them back up with plastic dolls inside.

A team of professionals are put together to help track this person down and stop the violence.

Like all MacBride books, 'A Song for the Dying' is violent, gritty and very dark with no happy endings in parts- yet MacBride still manages to inject sarcasm and humour into it. The characters are all well developed and I really liked the banter between Ash and some of the other characters. Some of the characters- Mrs Kerrigan and Wee Free McFee especially are really dark and scary (I wouldn't want to meet them in a dark alley!).

I would advise anyone wanting to read this to read 'Birthdays for the Dead' first, to get a feel for the history behind Ash.

If you like your murders dark and gripping- tinged with a bit of humour- then this is the one!!!



Jennifer Stewart

Tense, scary and filled with Stuart MacBride's unique blend of horror and

humour, 'A Song for the Dying' proved to be a fantastic, thrilling read.

Ash Henderson, disgraced detective from 'Birthdays for the Dead' is back..and so is "The Inside Man" so called because of the plastic doll he leaves underneath the skin of the women he murders. Ash, released from prison to join the investigation quickly becomes the driving force behind the hunt to find 'The Inside Man' and stop his killing spree.

Stuart MacBride is a master of combining horror with humour - the plots may be grim and the descriptions of the murders are messy but the characters and dialogue are brilliantly written and the touches of humour throughout are testament MacBride's skill as one of the best crime writers around.

*I always look forward to a new Stuart MacBride title and I can wholeheartedly say that **this lived up to all my expectations - horrifying but completley absorbing, reading this book turned into an all nighter - I just couldn't put it down. Utterly enjoyable.***

Gavin Dimmock - www.themoustachioedreader.wordpress.com

I must come clean right from the start; a confession almost. I like MacBride's novels; more specifically, I like his DI Logan McRae stories, and so, when given the opportunity to review this, I jumped at the chance.

MacBride fans will not be disappointed as this story follows similar themes to the McRae books – police investigation, our hero following his own enquiries and rebelling against his bosses, some great villainous characters, a smattering of humour and a dash of extreme violence. This is the second story featuring Ash Henderson, once a DI but now in prison for murdering his brother. He is released to help investigate the murder of a young nurse that bears the signature traits of "The Inside Man", indicating the killer is back after an eight year silence.

Despite this being book two, and not having read the first one, I didn't feel lost with the characters back stories. In fact, on this occasion, it was enjoyable to learn about the earlier storyline as this one progressed – it felt like I was discovering the evidence and deciphering the clues en-route.

There is violence aplenty within these pages and that may not be comfortable for some readers of crime. However, as with the McRae books, the violence is not there casually but, in my view, is a way of expressing the horror and anger felt, not only by the killer, but by the characters involved in the less pleasant side of the law.

The violence is rather splendidly offset by MacBride's humour. He has a neat way of adding little touches of comedy to ease the tension that builds throughout this story. His addition of local touches, the food and dialogue references for example, really add to the flavour of this book.

Les Warriner

If you can't sleep and rely on a book to help you nod off, this is not the book for you. I simply couldn't put it down - a superb read!

Former Detective Inspector Ash Henderson is released early from prison to assist in the hunt for the "Inside Man", who he had hunted some years previously. This highly unrealistic hypothesis sets the scene for a fast-paced drama, involving an interdepartmental task force, which uses Ash as a civilian consultant.

The rivalry between the various groups on the taskforce seems to be a recipe for disaster. The single view that most parties share is that Ash shouldn't be there. Ash happily ignores this and plods his own course through the investigation, leaving bodies and broken bones in his wake - pretty good for a walking stick-wielding ex cop.

Violence is both rife and cruel, but the author tempers this with a very subtle sense of humour. I have noticed in a number of books from north of the border what seems to be a new genre - Scottish Noir?

I am now beginning the first volume featuring DI Henderson, and look forward avidly to the next.

Judith Waring

By a lucky coincidence I had read the 'prequel' book to this one so it helped that I understood the gist of the situation and the relationship between the characters but it would still be fine to read this book as a stand-alone in its own right.

All I can say is PHEW! What a totally gripping author Stuart MacBride is and what a totally compelling story he has written yet again. I've never read an author whose use of words and descriptions is so spot-on that you can visualise the settings vividly, the dank weather, the brooding skies, the emotions, the pain.

Extremely fast paced, the main part of the novel is set basically within the confines of a week but a week where a ton of action takes place inside of it.

From the first chapter you are pulled headlong into the maelstrom of crime and events unfold and multiply so rapidly you feel time must be flying past and I was frequently brought up short and back to reality when I turned the page and saw the next day at the head of the next chapter and that what I'd just read had happened inside several hours only.

The violence is extreme to say the least and so wincingly real that you shudder and cringe with each blow and the protagonists are straight out of the dark gritty underbelly of the crime world.

You champion the lead characters and it's a complete page turner as you race to find out what's going to happen next and so it was with complete regret that I got to the last page and it was over.

I'll certainly be on the lookout for the next Stuart MacBride book, what a brilliant writer.

Liz Glithero

Gritty and violent but overall an enjoyable read. Preserve through the middle for a satisfying ending.

The story starts off well and grabs your attention but I found my attention strayed in the middle. I felt this section was padded out. However it came galloping back and grabbed me again for a satisfying conclusion.

The book is gritty and violent, a bit humourless with some good descriptive passages and phrases. I don't know if it was trying to sound like an American gangster novel but some of the dialogue and the characters didn't sound like a true picture of real life that I as an ordinary law abiding British person would recognise.

The characters are interesting but flawed. The 'hero' or 'anti-hero' Ash is mostly unlike able and I didn't understand or believe his relationship with Alice at all. Perhaps this would have been easier to understand if there had been more back story or history because I felt confused as you were thrown straight into the story without any explanation, perhaps it would have helped to have read the previous book in the series.

The minor characters were sometimes cliched or cartoonish; are all Scottish gangsters dense, gormless or weird?

Overall an enjoyable read.

Rebecca Cockeram

Dull! I really couldn't get into this book.

Sadly this book was not for me. I love a good crime thriller and this is not a good crime thriller.

I didn't care about any of the characters or the plot. It has no comic relief and seems like a rush book, where even the author has no love for his characters.

I struggled through this as it simply did not grip me. It's drab, dreary and dull. Dark, graphic and gruesome are not the only ingredients for a good thriller.

Glad it's over.

David Gay

Let me start by saying that I am a big fan of Stuart MacBride and have now read (and enjoyed) all of his books. 'A Song for the Dying' is MacBride's second book in the Ash Henderson series; like his more well known Logan McRae series the book is set in Scotland but in the fictional town of Oldcastle which is probably just as well otherwise he would be crossed off Tourism Scotland's Christmas card list.

*The book follows on from the first Ash Henderson novel (*Birthdays for the Dead*) and the books must be read in order for the characters and one of the main plotlines to make sense. Henderson is a much darker than McRae but shares the same sense of right and wrong; at the start of the book he is in prison after being framed for the murder of his brother at the end of *Birthdays for the Dead*. MacBride skilfully "springs" him from prison and makes him central to the investigation to capture "The Inside Man" a case that Henderson "couldn't forget".*

MacBride shows great skill in interweaving the investigation with Henderson plotting to get revenge on the person who framed him. The majority of the action takes place over four days and whilst the pace doesn't quite reach 24 levels it certainly more than keeps you interested. On more than one occasion I almost missed my tube stop as a result of being engrossed in the book and wanting to find out what happened next.

Whilst there are definite parallels between McBride's two characters McBride's ability to make them different but the same it to be applauded – both have complicated relationships with women, authority and the criminals; both are mavericks; both are the "leading man" but more importantly both are human

which allows you to identify and empathise with them. McBride's other skill lies in the crimes themselves; he makes them believable and gruesome without being overly graphic.

Would I recommend this book? Definitely; McBride is good storyteller; his characters are human (its hurts them when they punch someone) and there's not always a completely happy ending. **My only regret is that I'm now going to have to wait another two years for the next Ash Henderson story.**

Melanie Rose

Disappointing - not up to usual standards.

Very disappointed with this book. Does not live up to the usual standards ie Logan McRae series. Found the writing style hard to engage with and it took a lot longer to read the book than I would have expected. The characters were weak and it was confusing to try to remember who was who as there was little reference to their characters. I only persevered to the end as I usually enjoy books by this author and hoped it would get better - it didn't unfortunately.

Bev Farningham

DI Ash Henderson is in jail and being regularly beaten. Then he is released into 'custody' as it appears The Inside Man has resurfaced after 8 years.

Ash worked on this investigation but you have to ask why did they want him especially? After all there must have been many detectives working on this one. Also the three forces have now 'merged' but it is difficult to believe that only Ash can solve the mystery - or mysteries. Are the others twiddling their thumbs?

Add in a Mrs Kerrigan who wants him dead and it certainly rolls along - complete with Scottish sites, actions and words.