

Lovereadings Reader reviews of The Hangman's Song by James Oswald (An Inspector McLean Novel)

Below are the complete reviews, written by Lovereadings members.

Edel Waugh

A Truly Gripping Read.

'The Hangman's Song' by James Oswald is book three in the Inspector McLean series and I adored every single page of it. What starts off as an apparent suicide turns out to be something an awful lot darker and frightening. This was an awesome book and from the very beginning you jump right into the story. It was a real grab you from the start and pull you willingly though type of book.

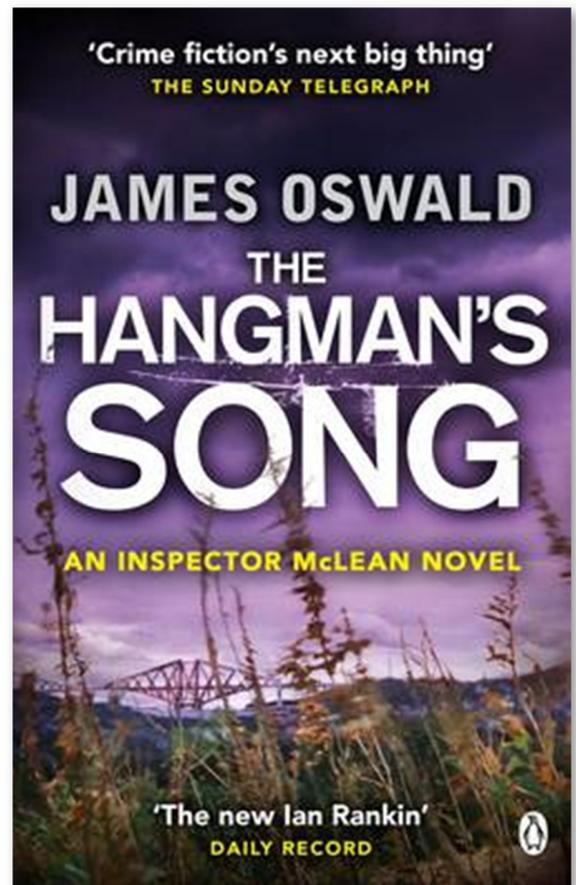
The story is set in Edinburgh, which I enjoyed, setting a book in a real place is fun especially if you are familiar with it.

The main character Inspector McLean is a hard working, laid back, likeable character who's job is tough going right now and who's personal life is a bit hit and miss. Between McLean's private life and his job there is plenty to keep you interested in the story.

I really liked McLean, the rest of the characters are just as interesting and enjoyable to read about too. My personal favourite was Grumpy Bob.

The crime scenes were very descriptive and I had no problems visualising what the author was trying to say plus the plot kept me wondering just how it was all going to come together at the end. The ending was smart and I did not see it coming. This book would easily motivate me to go find the other books in the series.

You can follow Edel's blog at: <http://edelwaugh.blogspot.ie/>



Susan Burton

Great book and worthy of a fourth book. The character is a likeable man and all what a great policeman should be.

I would thoroughly recommend you read this book and also the previous two. The book is well written and has many twists and turns and the main character, and some of his side kicks are very likeable. The plot twists and turns all along the way and it is only to the end that everything unfolds.

Phyllippa Smithson

Inevitably, given 'The Hangman's Song' has a basically criminal theme and is based in Edinburgh, comparisons would be made to the great Rebus. How clever that Oswald has created something so very different.

I had not read the previous two books in the Inspector McLean series and at the start of the book, I did not feel I was missing out. However, as the plot unravelled I began to lose some of the themes. I also found myself confused as to the genre – was it mystery, thriller, occult. In hindsight, 'The Hangman's Song' I think attempts to be all three and I am not sure that is to the benefit of the story or the reader.

McLean is a committed detective but is disliked by many of his peers, his senior management and those on his side have little influence. He also has a complex personal life as he looks to support, Emma, his partner. However, she has been in a coma since both were investigating a crime – in the previous book I assume.

The murder investigation is compelling, face-paced and absorbing. The thriller/occult however, dilutes these strengths and left me feeling frustrated and desperately keen to get to the end – and when i did I was left with more questions than I had answers.

Good to see other scottish writers entering the Rebus fray but for this reader, I am not yet converted.

Ray Orgill

An Edinburgh investigation involving Inspector McLean.

Inspector McLean is not a popular police officer. His juniors are wary of him and he is hounded by his superior, a newly appointed but acting Superintendent, who makes no attempt to disguise his dislike of Inspector McLean nor his methods of working.

*A chain of apparent suicides by hanging brings the two men to almost breaking point. The similarities between each hanging make the Inspector suspect involvement by a third party in each case but his mentor does not want this extra work and expense. **Author James Oswald weaves an intricate plot from these facts which involve police corruption, mind games and almost touch on the occult. An unforgettable story.***

Margaret Freeman

This is a compelling, if disturbing, book that kept me turning the pages to find out what happened next.

DI McClean, seconded to the Sexual Crimes Unit (SCU) by Acting Superintendent Charles Duguid (nicknamed Dagwood) finds himself working on two separate cases - one for the SCU investigating a group of prostitutes and the subsequent death of their pimp, Malky Jennings, who was beaten to death - and the second, two suicides, which he and his DC, MacBride consider to be suspicious, and continue to investigate against Duguid's instructions.

*'The Hangman's Song' is a dark, tense book; crime fiction with elements of the supernatural thrown in. The police force is undergoing great change as it prepares for unification as Police Scotland, adding to McLean's own difficulties with his colleagues, most of whom dislike him. He views them as incompetent, lazy and in some cases corrupt. All is not well in McLean's private life either. His girlfriend Emma (nearly killed in the previous book, *The Book of Souls*) comes out of a coma, but has lost most of her memory and has regressed to an eight-year old. She moves into McLean's house as she recovers.*

It is a complicated book with three storylines to keep in mind, and a large cast of characters, not all of them clearly distinguishable. It's not a book for the faint-hearted or the squeamish as there are details of some gruesome deaths, murders and beatings.

Having said that, it was still a compelling, if disturbing, book (particularly the last chapter) that kept me turning the pages to find out what happened next.

You can read Margaret's blog at: www.booksplease.org

Carol Peace

A great plot and well written I will be looking out for more by James Oswald.

This was an introduction to a new writer for me and I must say that I am not disappointed. Inspector McClean is the usual downtrodden policeman, undervalued and disliked by his superior officer. He has been put into the Vice department by that same officer who doesn't want him in his department. He seems to get himself involved in the minor corruption in the vice unit and makes it known that he will not stand by while it happens, he does not believe that allowing a criminal to carry on just because they know he is the lesser of two evils. His old dept seems to be falling apart and they keep involving him in the suicides of two unrelated boys. He just doesn't think they are suicides and he gets involved more than he should. Underlying all this his home life is also spiraling out of control.

With all this going on you would think it was difficult to keep up but the writing was so clever that I had no problem feeling as though I was part of this plot and the clues just kept coming leading you one way and then another. When you realise just how it all came together the plot took another turn.

I will definately be looking out for another of James Oswalds books.

Linda Hill

'The Hangman's Song' is gripping, unusual and thrilling.

Although reading the first two books in the Inspector McLean series might have helped to understand all the references, not having done so does not affect the fantastic enjoyment of this novel.

Oswald is a highly skilful writer, blending crime fiction and the supernatural in a very gripping way. The plot twists and turns with the reader making several guesses as to the perpetrators of a range of crimes, including murder, until the ending that resolves immediate elements and still leaves the reader desperate to find out what happens next to McLean and Emma.

Some of the police characters are a little stereotypical but do not detract from the success of the writing and they are, nonetheless, believable. The settings are cinematic in style so that the reader can picture them in their mind's eye very effectively.

I thoroughly enjoyed this novel and recommend it without

hesitation.

Sally Welham

Fast paced thriller but read his other books first.

The McLean series of books are all well written detective stories with a sympathetic view of the modern day pressures on police work. I am not sure that they are stand alone books due to the many references to the past histories of the characters.

This is fast paced but with a good insight into modern day policing with all the politics and budget constraints. I like the introduction of the supernatural and the fact that the central character is sceptical but can find no rational explanation for some of the things he sees. It very much leaves it up to the reader to draw their own conclusions.

The characters are interesting and nicely fallible and there are several threads for you to follow. I have enjoyed these books and this author and I particularly love his descriptions of Edinburgh.

You can follow Sally on Twitter: @nicgillian

Jennifer Stewart

A maelstrom of murders and supernatural mysteries that picks you up on page one and drops you on the last page, panting and left wanting more!

This novel sweeps you up on page one in a maelstrom of murders and supernatural mysteries and drops you on the last page, panting and left wanting more.

Aptly named, 'The Hangman's Song', third in the DI Tony McLean series, revolves around a spate of supposed suicides of young men by hanging in Edinburgh. Although on the face of it, they seem to be straightforward, McLean is not convinced but has to battle with his, now superior officer, Duguid, to be allowed to investigate further.

Alongside this, McLean is coping with the rehabilitation of his colleague and girlfriend Emma, who was seriously injured in the previous novel, The Book of Souls, and is pursuing a case of smuggling of prostitutes while he is working in the Sexual Crimes unit.

A supernatural thread has run through the first two books of this series, but is much more pronounced in this book, and I was constantly left wondering what was of this world and what wasn't. I love police procedurals because of their logical nature, and the fact that you always find out who dunnit in the end. However, this leaves you hanging in more ways than one.... but in such a great way. James Oswald's plotting is so intricate and clever, weaving all the threads together to make this a magical read. Slightly frustrating in that you feel that all the answers are just out of your reach, but wholly satisfying in that you know book four is not far off!

Alison Jones

This is a multi-faceted story of a police service in flux, a series of perplexing hangings, sexual crimes not satisfactorily investigated and a policeman's girlfriend clawing her way to normality following major trauma. It is in fact the third in Edinburgh's Inspector McLean series and not having read the others, I felt a slight disadvantage as I attempted to piece together the references to previous events.

*It seemed just a little confusing as the strands were presented but it slowly all weaved together to make a quality read. In the background there were odd ball characters and the machinations and shenanigans of a police station which made this sometimes dark, sometimes graphic thriller an entertaining and realistic book. **It was so good I almost overcame my unfamiliarity with the previous two instalments and I'm keen to read more.***

Alan Brown

An easy to read Police Procedural.

'The Hangman's Song' was an easy to read crime fiction novel. The words chosen and the sentence lengths kept me closely involved.

The book is number three in a series and does build on the previous two but can be read as a stand alone story.

It is unfair to compare this book with other detective stories based in Edinburgh as the author, James Oswald, develops the story in his own way so that reading this police procedural (in the loosest terms) is a unique experience.

I hope there are more books to come.

Siobhan McDowell

From page One I was hooked on this really addictive story which would not let me go. The characters created by the author were so real that if I walked into a police station in Edinburgh I would not at all be surprised to be dealing with someone that he portrayed on these pages. The plot was at times a bit obvious but was it thrilling or what?

I would recommend this book as a stand-alone read as I believe it forms part of a series.

Totally enjoyable read and now I must get to the bookshop to search out a few other of his titles!

Julie Bertschin

A highly addictive storyline to this chillingly brilliant novel.

*'The Hangman's Song' features the doggedly determined, caring and clever Inspector McLean. The series of hangings occurring on his patch look like more than suicide but there is little evidence to support his theory. His boss and his fellow police officers do little to assist him; his girlfriend's loss of memory after being recently attacked and traumatic events from his past all culminate in a man under severe stress. I found this story **very intriguing; the plot unravels at a tantalising speed keeping the reader hooked right to the last page.** Enjoy!*

Lisa Redmond

This is the third book in the bestselling DI McLean series set in Edinburgh. I have read and enjoyed the previous two books and this third instalment is another exciting and page turning read.

It is a long hot summer in Edinburgh and Tony McLean is called to what at first would appear to be a simple but tragic suicide. However something doesn't quite add up and when another hanged man is found Tony begins to grow suspicious. However with his nemesis Duguid now acting Superintendent, it seems Tony cannot get anyone to take his suspicions seriously. Instead he has been seconded to the Sex Crimes Unit where it seems even the detectives are on the take. On top of that Emma is out of hospital and coming to terms with the trauma of her attack. With so much on his plate will Tony work it all out in time before the Hangman's Song is sung for him?

James Oswald's novels are brilliant, sharp eyed observations of contemporary policing and the horrors of the criminal mind. There is also a supernatural element which remains a quiet background presence and won't be off putting to readers who are not fans of the paranormal. I cannot wait to read the next instalment in the series and **cannot recommend these books highly enough.**

Karin Gibson

James Oswald does it again with his third book.

'The Hangman's Song' is a very good follow up to the previous two books. The description of the first hanging is gripping and makes you want to read on. The way the book is written makes you feel on edge and a little off kilter. It also makes you feel as though McLean needs to get his head together and not to be so off tak and confused. The relationship with him and the new superintendent makes you feel quite angry as you are rooting for the "hero". Where are HR when you need them, he is obviously being bullied. Needless to say all becomes clear and ends in a cliffhanger that obviously will lead to a rematch. **Worth a readYes 100 percent.**

Rachel Hall

This book was the first of James Oswald's Inspector McLean series that I have read, yet being new to the character did not detract from the likeability of the Inspector, however, what did slightly was the fact that the novel picks up pretty much from where the second has left off and thus leaves the reader somewhat confused by the supernatural elements of the storyline.

Set in Edinburgh Inspector McLean is resented by his superiors and rank and file officers alike and finds himself seconded to the Sexual Crime Units from CID. The prime reason for this is to keep the bitter McLean out of trouble. However McLean manages to embroil himself in two cases, both equally gripping - that of a group of prostitutes about to be shipped overseas and their murdered pimp, and a series of hangings with unnerving similarities. On top of this, his home life is in turmoil with his previous girlfriend Emma, a former police photographer, moving in following an unfortunate incident when she was nearly killed in the line of duty. Whilst both the criminal investigations are plausible at first, the hangings turn out to be the main focus of the novel along with the development of Emma's character. It is this section of the book that I

found was weaker and involved the supernatural, and although my eagerness to read on never faltered it did serve as a slightly disappointing ending.

*At first this seemed like **an easy to read, fast paced and action packed crime novel which was hugely enjoyable and involving, however the final few chapters brought the supernatural element to the surface and this did spoil my overall enjoyment of the book** by being highly implausible. Although I had developed a huge fondness for the central characters of Inspector McLean and his colleagues by the end of the novel, I would want to know how much influence the supernatural element has before embarking on the preceding novels in the series.*

Joy Bosworth

Realistic police novel - one of a series.

I liked the descriptions of (some) parts of Edinburgh and the authentic cat-and-mouse of office politics. The main character is a likeable one but I really disliked the graphic gruesomeness.

The authors flair for descriptions palls when decayed corpses and beaten bodes are described in nauseating detail and then referenced repeatedly.

I stuck with this until spirits, Ouija boards and souls being trapped in a book were introduced. I can accept the stomach turning realism if I must, but not in a novel that includes the antithesis of realism too.

I can think of a few men who would really enjoy the driving and car angle of this book and I'm sure it will appeal to many - just not me.

Tracey Poulter

This is the third book in the Inspector Maclean series of crime novels and, although I was new to the series, I didn't feel at a disadvantage when reading it.

The series is set in Scotland, with an Inspector who doesn't get on with his superior officer and has problems adapting to new colleagues, which brings obvious comparisons with Rebus. Oswald has, however, added extra dimensions to the character of McLean with hints of the supernatural and some colourful characters outside of the police.

Inspector McLean is working on two very different cases at the same time – a series of suspicious hangings and a human trafficking ring – and neither is straightforward. In addition there are complications in his private life as his

girlfriend is in a coma which is related to a previous case. The reader is kept on their toes but the book is cleverly written to allow you to follow the various twists and turns, without giving too much away.

*I enjoyed the characterisations in this book and the fact that it was not always obvious who the victims were. **The book has a mix of genres - mystery, thriller, supernatural - which takes it outside of the normal run of detective stories and I found it strangely compelling.** This was the first Inspector McLean story I had read but it definitely won't be the last.*