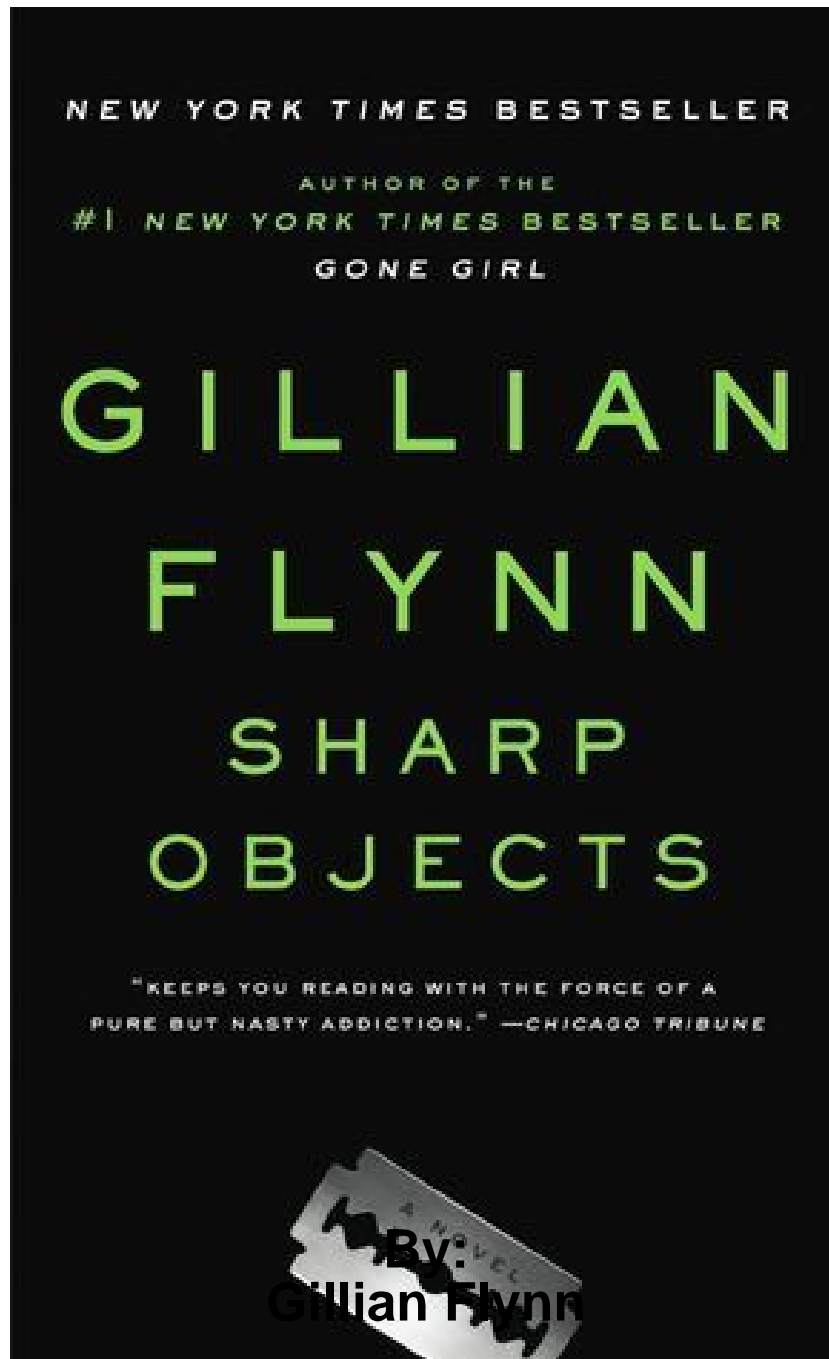


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What people Say:

Emily May

. It's in the characters, in the story, in the relationships, in the sex, and just in the general mood of the novel. Reading this made me feel a little unwell, both physically and mentally, but I am glad I did. If you know me, you'll know I love complex characters with issues that feel raw and real, rather than melodramatic. The people in this novel are majorly fucked up, no one is

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The protagonist - Camille Preaker - was just thirteen when her sister died and fuelled by grief (amongst other things) Camille spent her teen years carving words into her flesh, covering almost every inch of her body with the marks of her pain. Ten years later, Camille Preaker is now a journalist who returns to the small town of her youth to report on the murders of two young girls - girls who had had all of their teeth removed.

Camille is soon caught up in the town once again, she tries to get along with the mother who never loved her and establish a relationship with the troublesome half sister she hardly knows. It seems that once again

and Camille finds herself getting dragged deeper and deeper into the investigation, her fragile state of mind constantly threatening to tip her over the edge.

This is one mean and nasty book. I knew I was getting a dark, psychological thriller, but I expected something on par with

by

. Um, not exactly. Flynn never shies away from the horrific details. You're not going to find anything pleasant in this story; sex, for example, is always something complex - it's an escape or a bargain or a catharsis. Everything else is similar.

Flynn does a fantastic job of challenging the notion that women are weak, innocent, damsels in distress. In a world where women are victims - both in their media representation and in statistics - this is a very interesting look at other kinds of women. It's programmed into us to believe that women are safer, kinder, built with an instinct that makes it difficult for them to be cruel and cause pain without reason.

Last updated: April 2016

RandomAnthony

Last week I read the fuck out of Gillian Flynn's catalog. Three novels in eight days while my wife and kids were out of town and a sweltering late July marooned me in one of the house's two air conditioned rooms. So although this review is primarily for

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(four stars, go read another of the zillion of reviews) and

(three stars, maybe too many narratives perspectives and too willing to wallow in the muck) as well, but I'm not writing reviews for those two.

, to me, stands out as Flynn's best so far. The narrator and the storyline don't dance with each other in a seamless, synchronized manner; family history and unwritten community norms mosh-pit it up until the collective response to the murders reminded me of that Soundgarden video where all the faces go funhouse-mirror-y. This narrator isn't a shining heroine. She's very human, supremely fucked up, trying to make sense and move forward. Maybe that's what makes

so interesting.

Alex

This is my third

book, after

and

. The first one blew my mind, the second one freaked me out a little and this one really scared me.

Sure, after reading 5% of it I was like

--a creepy story with the potential of giving me special nightmares,

but by 90% I was like

WTF did I just read??

All the characters were disturbing,

even the children.

Simon_Cleveland_Ph.D. Simon_Cleveland_Ph.D.

The razor blade on the front cover of the book is what one yearns for right after embarking on this read, sharp blade with which to cut every single page, one by one, until they are so neatly shredded that even the memory of what was written on them becomes non-existent. And then, one can use the same razor to end one's own life.

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This book is dangerous and not because it excites one with a thrilling and suspenseful story. It is dangerous because once one reads it, one loses any desire to look for another book that may restore one's faith in the existence of good books with an uplifting charge. Not only is this book dangerous, but it is sick. Its underlying sickness is that it's emotionally draining and unless readers are looking to load up on more mental baggage (I can't think of anyone who doesn't have enough), I'd stay away from its pain.

The main character is a female reporter who returns home on an assignment (covering the serial murders of two little girls). As memories of her painful childhood emerge, readers find a lot more about her character, for example her alcoholic addiction and her obsession to carve words into her

own flesh. Waves of her unresolved issues wash away further hopes of a challenging literary work as readers are practically dragged into her problems (not loved enough by her mother, not popular enough in school, not motivated enough in her work) and are subjected to the anguish of either feeling sorry for her or wanting to end her existence.

As disturbing details of the two murders resurface, readers are introduced to yet two more characters as equally unpleasant as the first. There is the psychologically unstable (almost emotionally poisonous) personality of her mother and the pathologically sinister and equally disturbed one of the teenage sister. And of course there are the endlessly problematic and mentally crushing details of the small-town's Midwest America (why would one want to read this is beyond my understanding).

This book robs one of smiles, of the beauty of life, and even of the reason for love. It is not only bitter, but leaves one with an unpleasant smell of what I'd like to call rotten feelings. I can't brand the book dull (as it did leave me with unwanted thoughts), but I can promise you that you'll feel dull once you've read it. I don't recommend it, but may compare the feelings I have for it to what Chuck Palahniuk's 'Choke' birthed in me.

Paquita Maria Sanchez

Well, this was a pleasant surprise. I remember all the ruckus over Gillian Flynn a while back, and my resulting tracing (

carving) of a mental note on my palm that I should eventually read something by this gal because everybody was all in a tizzy over her wonderfulmousnessity back whenever, and I was confused by that fact based on the book descriptions alone. It all just sounded like mass market thrillers dressed up in fancy lit fic suits. Ya know, the stuff of mediocre books which sometimes

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carving) of a mental note on my palm that I should eventually read something by this gal because everybody was all in a tizzy over her wonderfulmousnessity back whenever, and I was confused by that fact based on the book descriptions alone. It all just sounded like mass market thrillers dressed up in fancy lit fic suits. Ya know, the stuff of mediocre books which sometimes get passed to great directors, screen-writers, and actors, and then maybe turned into really good movies. Basically, I just wanted to understand what the hell was going on with this new girl at the middle school who showed up mid-semester and got all the attention just because her folks were always out of town so you

could smoke pot at her house and raid the liquor cabinet or whatever. I shamefully admit, I was ready and willing to dislike her. Maybe I'm shallow, and so was put off by the pop of it all. Maybe that one time I saw

as a stickered best-selling! 20% off Audio Book, I silently simmered further, my eyes squintier still. Whatever, it doesn't matter. I was wrong. I frequently forget that this is a very frequent occurrence.

From the first couple of pages, maybe even the first, I acknowledged my ass-umptions. The writing is astute in its observations, visceral in its descriptions. And the narrator is all messed up, which hear, hear. I actually stopped when I realized I'd read about 100 pages without looking away, and thought to myself: I should read more thrillers, huh? Well, no. Most of them that I have come across are not this confidently, this surgically composed. There is no fluffy stuffing here, just good, straight storytelling with the added bonus of cautiously crafted prose. Also, it's really fucking creepy, and me being creeped out by anything at this point in my life is a pretty tall order. I mean, aside from spiders and needles and being buried alive and over-sexualized pre-teen Lolita-types who collect and dress like that Bratz line of toy dolls. Now

shit is creepy. Fortunately, a couple of those things are directly addressed in this novel. My goodness, it must be terrifying having a daughter, or being an adult dude today. Or a human at all. Yeah, it is.

The story itself meanders in a way which is icky, thoroughly hammered out, and fairly unpredictable. I may be inflating the rating because my expectations were so low, but that doesn't change the fact that I will be reading another novel by this author because she isn't some hack; she just likes to slum a little, subject-wise. And that's more than okay with me, it turns out.

Cutters, Lolitas, Munchausen by Proxy, obsessions, family hatreds, drug abuse, scandalous sex, graphic violence, serial murder, wealth, poverty, popularity, bullying, hypochondria, crippling jealousy, police procedural bullshit, alcoholism, taboo masturbation fantasies, eating disorders, small town smothering, big city anonymity, career/life/love failures, falls from grace, the hell of being romantically idealized by someone and then seen in vivid, horrible detail for what you really are: all addressed in this slim little novel. It's pretty fucking good, to be honest. Just...don't loan it to your mother. And hope that no one in this novel reminds you of your mother. Don't be bothered if you see a little of yourself here and there, though. We're all headcases sometimes, right? Please just agree with me.