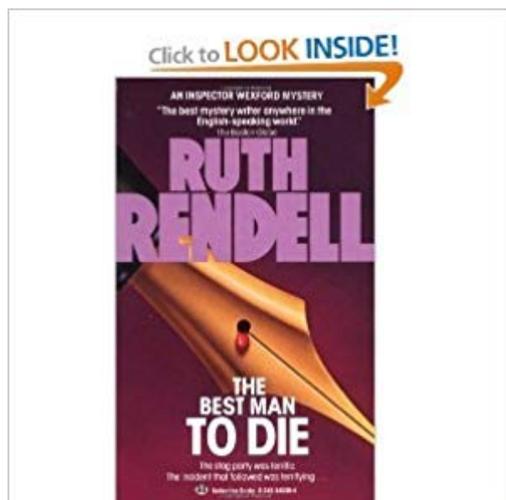


Best Man to Die *by* Ruth Rendell



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Reviews of the *Best Man to Die* *by* Ruth Rendell

Hawk Flying

Ruth Rendell is a great writer. She makes everything she writes come alive with her vivid and perceptive descriptions. This book is no exception, but the story is weak. It's a short story filled out with 150 pages of well-written description and observation that have nothing to do with the story. The plot is interesting, with two seemingly unconnected strands and the usual red herrings. But then it suddenly ends with Inspector Wexford solving the mystery with clairvoyant, Sherlock Holmes-like perception. Rendell usually does a lot better.

Usic

"It was as though the clouds were not themselves mere vapour but impermeable sagging sacks, purposely constructed and hung to contain water."

For imagery alone it is worth going back to 1969 when Inspector Wexford's life was simpler. He has time to observe the weather, the night sky, and, in one majestic passage, the fields of grain in all their sunlit glory. Beyond that, you may be disappointed if you are used to contemporary Kingsmarkam. Most obvious are the dated references to contraceptives and troublesome wives and daughters, not to mention the absurdly low value of currency at the time. ("She was an heiress and she had a hundred thousand pounds...") In this and presumably her other early novels now available for the Kindle, Rendell shows how clever she is in constructing her crimes, but her characters are more predictable (in a class-conscious Britain), and the scenes seem almost to have been made for the stage. "The lightning flared into his face and, covering his eyes with one hand, he said desperately..." The biggest surprise to me was that the Inspector was grumpier and fustier back then. He continually spouts from literature, as he is still wont to do, and he enjoys curmudgeonly sparring with the local doctor, but he doesn't yet carry the weight of societal change and family disappointments.

I recommend reading THE BEST MAN TO DIE for social history and also to learn how writers evolve their series characters. I learned something by downloading what seemed like a bargain: On Kindle, the copyright will be the date the story was made into an e-book. The first date of publication was nowhere to be seen. Henceforth, I will check with one of several webs sites to get a chronological list of an author's novels before buying a book. In this case, the lower price is a tip-off.

The St. Zita Society: A Novel

Xurad

Ruth Rendell is a great mystery writer. On this occasion, I found her writing difficult to follow. Her writing shares the blame with my reading habits which are maybe ten pages a night, but not every night. With a good mystery, one doesn't fall asleep after ten pages or one shouldn't use it as a means to fall asleep as you can lose characters and plot. For the reader who likes to sit down over a day or two and finish a book.

Opithris

Well written with an intriguing plot. I gave up on Rendell after reading a couple of her books in which the characters were so despicable that I could hardly finish them. I was not aware of the Wexford series at the time. I am glad I tried one as the inspector is quite delightful.

Hanelynai

Not a sympathetic detective or other characters. One of the weirder detective novels I have read. I couldn't identify with the detective and found the characters of the book distasteful. Perhaps not a book the average American can identify with. May be better for UK readers.

Delari

Great story, typical Ruth Rendell. Her characters are very believable and the storyline keeps you guessing. However there's a typo on virtually every page, which is very distracting.

Xal

Glad I've stuck with Inspector Wexford. The series is filling out with this installment. Everyone -- cops and criminals -- are more interesting and I'm getting to feel as if I know Wexford better and better. Plots still seem a bit contrived, with elements that come together in the end, but don't do so in any significant or meaningful way. I mean, it's just a bloke solving crimes, no larger insight into society is gained with the solution of the crime... We'll see if Wexford starts asking the big questions...

Not up to her usual standards I feel. Inspector Wexford is, of course, a plodding but intuitive detective who works until he gets his man. But the author does write novels that you don't put down until you reach the end.

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