

Key to Lawrence

Special Edition



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Linda Cargill, Gary Cargill (researcher)

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Water rushed into the four, great smoke stacks of the ship as they, too, hit the waves. Tremendous, churning whirlpools sucked victims inside. A few were ejected, blackened with soot. Propellers rose above the maelstrom. The rudder lifted higher than the smoke stacks. The ship's prow pointed down toward the deep. It looked as if the ship's nose would hit the sea bed hundreds of feet below. The Lusitania sank in only 18 minutes after being torpedoed on May 7, 1915. Dora Benley vowed revenge on the enemy. Key to Lawrence tracks the beginning of her quest for justice in this special edition of the first volume of the Edward Ware Thriller Series. It commemorates the 100th anniversary of the Great War.

Key to Lawrence Details

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From Reader Review Key to Lawrence for online ebook

Beth Tidman says

Enjoyable entertaining read that kept me guessing.

Ian Wood says

This is the entire review as it appears on my blog. Note that there are links in the blog review which do not appear here.

Beware spoilers!! You can class this as a DNF.

Twenty-year-old Dora Benley is about to embark upon a first class transatlantic voyage upon the luxury liner Lusitania. A very suspicious man is watching her on the dock, and he later boards the ship. He seems extraordinarily interested in the package she's carrying. It's a birthday present she's holding for her father's birthday on the voyage. Why is the stranger interested in an ordinary birthday present? Who ransacked her cabin trying to find it?

Cargill who writes technically well, based on first impressions and has set up an intriguing-sounding adventure, but it went nowhere for me. The RMS Lusitania was a real ship. It sank three years after the Titanic with pretty much the same magnitude of loss of life, yet it garners nowhere near the attention which the Titanic does. Why is that? The Lusitania is far more of a mystery than the Titanic was. It's known that it was hit by a torpedo from a German U boat, a submarine which would never have been able to catch the Lusitania in a straight race, so fast was the ship (for its time), but the U boat just happened to be fortuitously (or disastrously, dependent upon your perspective) in the right place at the wrong time.

It fired only the one torpedo. The damage was sufficient to sink the ship, but also of such limited scope that everyone ought to have been able to get off the ship reasonably comfortably. However, shortly after the torpedo hit, there was another explosion - of something inside the Lusitania - which doomed it and some twelve hundred people on board. The ship upended just like the Titanic, the prow hitting the bottom of the ocean while the stern was still high in the air and it sank within eighteen minutes. Unlike the Titanic which was swallowed by twelve thousand feet of bitterly cold ocean, the sea was rather shallow just eleven miles off the Irish coast where the Lusitania went down.

Where was the Royal Navy, which was supposed to escort the ship home to Liverpool through these dangerous waters? It was known that the Germans were in the area and targeting all suspect shipping around the British Isles. As Cargill points out in her novel, warnings had been issued by the Germans that all ships suspected of carrying munitions would be deemed to be targets. Indeed, one was published in some fifty American newspapers, including one right by the side of the advertisement for the Lusitania's upcoming voyage. The Lusitania was carrying some fifty tonnes of shells, and over four million rounds of ammunition, as wikipedia points out. Did the British want her to be hit, in the hope that the Americans would be drawn into the war? As I said, far more mystery surrounds the Lusitania than the Titanic. It was ripe for a novel!

I have to wonder about the propriety of Charles Klein propositioning Dora with a dinner invitation, and sitting with her at a table with her having no chaperon, but she's far more concerned about the mysterious

stranger, a glimpse of whom is all she can claim in the sumptuous dining room, before she loses sight of him completely. I also wonder about the propriety of her 'powdering her nose' quite literally (at least, faking it) at the dinner table, as she uses her mirror to scan the dining room behind her. I'm not at all sure a proper woman would do such a crass thing in 1915. Perhaps Dora isn't so proper?!

Unfortunately with this novel, I was all-too-rapidly at the point where I had to question some of Cargill's writing. This is 1915, supposedly, not 2013, so why is Dora behaving like she's not from 1915? This isn't a time travel novel! I was willing to allow some 'artistic license' for the story, with Dora running around unsupervised and unescorted even though she was, legally speaking in 1915, a child, but Cargill takes this beyond what is reasonable. Dora is talking with men she does not know and has never met. She's running around with a guy who is over twice her age. Her parents are practically non-existent for all her interaction with them. They seem to take no interest in her, or her welfare, or her whereabouts, or in the company she's keeping! I know Dora isn't a nun, and this is 1915, not 1815, but Cargill's dispensation with propriety has gone too far for me to put any stock in its credibility.

It's also unreasonable that Dora would hold on to that birthday gift in such circumstances. Ships like the Lusitania had a purser whose duty, in part, was to take charge of passenger valuables and lock them away safely. It makes no sense for her to be wrestling with where to hide the humidor and thinking of prevailing upon Charles to secure it for her when she could have turned it in to the purser and been done with it. For all she knows, Charles could be a part of the plan to steal it!

It makes no sense at all, either, for her to be receiving threatening notes, and to have her cabin broken into and ransacked, and for her to not even think of reporting these things and identifying the man whom she thinks is responsible. She's a first class passenger for goodness sakes! Back then, and rightly or wrongly, that meant something. This not only breaks, but completely shatters suspension of disbelief. I could see a story here wherein the shabby man whom she thinks is the threat is actually a benefactor, and it's Charles who is the villain! There would be an entertaining story, but it appears that this story isn't that one, since the man, often referred to as 'the Arab' by Cargill (talk about racial profiling!), fires a shot at her, and chases her. She encounters some of the very wealthiest passengers, a Vanderbilt amongst them, yet despite her state of dishevelment, not a single one of them behaves gallantly!

Despite a gun being fired aboard the ship, not a single one of the crew shows up or takes the slightest interest in what's going on. This is beyond ridiculous! I'm sorry, but at this point this novel precipitously dropped from being attractive to being completely absurd. It's inconceivable that such men would uniformly turn Dora's distress into a joke and make risqué remarks. It gets worse, from there, too. Dora is escorted into a supposedly private dining room where Cargill proceeds to trumpet how much research she did by dropping one name after another, every one of whom, male and female, consistently makes fun of Dora's predicament. This is purest bullshit.

Cargill writes almost as though the ship's manifest made zero mention of munitions, but that isn't correct. Some things apparently were hidden, but the ship's manifest did identify some munitions that were aboard. The ship was an auxiliary warship, and had been for some time. Indeed, Cunard had received a subsidy for building this ship and its two sisters, the Mauritania and the Aquitania, on the understanding that in the event of war, they could be commandeered, armed, and used for military purposes as the Lusitania was indeed being employed. To imply that this wasn't so is misleading at best. Indeed, it was this very fact which triggered Germany to issue warnings that the Lusitania would be deemed to be a military vessel.

This story continued to deteriorate from there. We have "the Arab" hauling Dora from her cabin to a different one and then from there to a third cabin, with not a single person seeing or hearing them or Dora's

cries. Despite having access to a port hole in the last cabin, Dora makes only one brief attempt to call for help and then she gives up and takes a nap! In that cabin, she can hear her parents outside the porthole quite clearly discussing her mysterious absence, yet never once does she call out to them. Clearly if she can hear them, they can hear her. All she had to do was to loudly call out that she was right there in the cabin, and that she had been abducted, and this whole thing would be over. Yet she stays quietly watching her captor build chemical bombs! I'm sorry but this is infantile.

She sleeps another night in captivity making no attempt whatsoever to break the glass or to call to passers-by even though she can hear them clearly. No one on the ship seems to think her disappearance is worth bothering with! No one considers that she might have gone overboard. The next morning the ship's crew runs a lifeboat drill (why so late in the journey?!) with scores of people right outside the porthole and never once does Dora utter a sound! I can only conclude that Dora is a complete Moron Sue and no hero about whom I'd want to read anything. She's finally discovered by Byrne, the guy who was whining to her about there being munitions on the ship, and she escapes her prison with his aid, but after she's free, she never thinks even for a second of contacting her parents to let them know she's safe! She never once considers going to the captain to tell him what happened and to warn him that there's a bomb aboard the ship!

This is about fifty pages in and by that point I'd had more than enough. This novel is beyond ludicrous and it's entirely unbelievable. It could have been a worthy story, but that chance was let slip and far from being worthy, it's a definite, without-question warty tale! I have far better things to do with my time than to read this kind of crap.

Joanne Wood says

An excellent mystery that did a fine job of conjuring a sense of time and place. I didn't know as much as I probably should about the Lusitania but this book went some way to picking my interest to find out more. It was a well-crafted story and I look forward with interest to reading the next from this team

Teddy O'Malley says

Key To Lawrence follows Dora Benley who has a package that a mysterious stranger would like to get his hands on.

The brilliant details painted a portrait that made me feel like I was really there in 1915 on the Lusitania. The action kept me on the edge of my seat the entire time. My favourite character was Dora Benley because she was witty and seemed easy to get along with.

If you are looking for a great mystery, don't pass this one up! I will definitely be reading it again.

Heather Domin says

[to be reviewed for HNS May 2009:]

