



## **The Pyramid: And Four Other Kurt Wallander Mysteries**

*Henning Mankell , Laurie Thompson (Translator) , Ebba Segerberg (Translator)*

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Filling in the missing pieces of the internationally bestselling Kurt Wallander mystery series, The Pyramid tells the story of Wallander's beginnings through five gripping short mysteries.

## **The Pyramid: And Four Other Kurt Wallander Mysteries Details**

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Author : Henning Mankell , Laurie Thompson (Translator) , Ebba Segerberg (Translator)

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## **From Reader Review The Pyramid: And Four Other Kurt Wallander Mysteries for online ebook**

### **Kathy says**

Have read other Wallander full novels and enjoyed them as I have enjoyed watching the series, but this book does not serve as a good intro. It is filling in blanks with several shorts, and had I read this first I would never have pursued the novels. Stilted telling with little hope that Wallander will wake up...(not exaggerating as he even walks himself into a serious knife stabbing).

It was a fresh and clean paperback from my library so that was good. Pyramid was probably the best tale of the bunch. The recounting of his first case did not show Kurt in a good light.

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### **Tim says**

Henning Mankell is one of my favourite crime authors. His Wallander novels are darkly atmospheric, with a bleakness that is somehow compelling.

*The Pyramid* is a collection of short stories written mainly in the late nineties. They fill in some of the earlier points of Wallander's career, starting with his time as a young policeman in the late sixties, and his very first case as a detective.

I think perhaps Mankell's techniques of plot revelation work better in a longer form - I found that the pacing didn't work as well for me in these stories as it does in the novels. I was also a little disappointed in the younger Wallander - he seemed practically identical to the older version we meet in *Faceless Killers*. I would have liked to feel there was more character development between the 21 year old rookie and the 42 year old chief inspector. I think I was also hoping for Rydberg to appear in more of a mentoring role than he does. By the time we meet him, Wallander is already established as a senior detective in Ystad, and they are more or less peers.

Having said all that, I did enjoy the stories, especially the last two, which are essentially shorter versions of the kind of tale Mankell tells in the novels. The trademark themes of alienation, loneliness, and mistrust of a changing society are all there, and as ever the Swedish landscape and weather are beautifully evoked.

Worthwhile for Wallander fans, but probably not recommended for newcomers - read one of the novels instead.

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### **Lobstergirl says**

A rather unnecessary book - five stories that constitute a prequel to the Wallander series, beginning when Kurt is just a lad starting out on the police force in the 60s and not yet married to malcontent hairdresser Mona. Apparently there was a great hue and cry from Mankell fans, in the form of letters, wanting to know

what had happened to Wallander before the series began. (Personally I never wondered. It was enough for me to believe that the divorced 40-something curmudgeon sprang fully grown from a Petri dish, or from the cold sea waters off Skåne, drinking coffee, eating sandwiches, pissing outdoors.)

The first two mysteries are quite terrible. The third and fourth, as Wallander's marriage heads downhill, are less terrible but still kind of awful. The fifth, *The Pyramid*, brings us more in line with the series itself; the writing is more interesting, the mystery slightly more involving, and it ends with the same phone call introducing a murder that begins *Faceless Killers*. We learn that Wallander looks at the thermometer before he puts on a sweater, because he wants to wear the sweater of a thickness which precisely corresponds to that day's weather. I do the same. This, in fact, could be me: *Wallander stood indecisively in front of his sweaters for a long time before he was able to select one*. Unlike Wallander, I do not employ a phone book when I run out of toilet paper.

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### **Jeffrey Keeten says**

**"Wallander woke up shortly after six o'clock on the morning of the eleventh of December. At the same moment that he opened his eyes, his alarm clock went off. He turned it off and lay staring out into the dark. Stretched his arms and legs, spread his fingers and toes. That had become a habit, to feel if the night had left him with any aches. He swallowed in order to check if any infection had sneaked into his respiratory system. He wondered sometimes if he was slowly becoming a hypochondriac."**

### **Kenneth Branagh as Wallander**

Kurt Wallander has good reason to always be checking his health. He works too many hours, his eating schedule is haphazard at best, and he goes days sometimes with little or no sleep. Really the only time he can catch up on his sleep is when he is sick and he does get sick...a lot. He suffers from crippling depression especially when he is between cases. His wife has left him. His daughter is a floating presence just off stage most of the time. His father is cranky, disappointed that his son became a cop, and like Kurt mostly lost in his own world only instead of puzzling over a murder he is painting the same landscape picture over and over sometimes with a grouse and sometimes without.

### **Krister Henriksson as Wallander in the Swedish version**

This is a compilation of five short stories. I was under the impression that these would all be cases from his days before the novels begin. The first story is of his first case where Wallander is still in uniform, but already displaying the tenacity that makes him a valued investigating detective. The best story is also the longest story called *The Pyramid* which is with Kurt in his forties already divorced and in the time line falls much later in his career.

Over the course of these stories Wallander does find himself bludgeoned, smacked, knifed, tied up, attacked by a dog, and in a position where he has to use his gun to return fire at an assailant. He closes his eyes when he shoots; so his aim, to say the least, is less than perfect. Dirty Harry he is not. Despite these near death experiences Wallander seems impervious to changing the way he investigates. Once he lands on a new line of inquiry he rarely has time to find a partner to go with him. People are just annoying distractions to his thinking process. Going solo does put him at risk, but the rewards, in his mind, outweigh a potentially

carelessly achieved early death.

Usually in a book series we are supposed to root for our hero to find romance. In the case of Wallander whenever a new woman has caught his attention **I'm yelling, run, run for your sanity**. He is mysterious and intriguing to women. They think this quiet man is thoughtful, smart, and successful. When they can get his attention away from a case he must provide all the proper responses to keep the relationship moving forward. It doesn't take long for them to learn that he is absolutely obsessed with his case load. At first they can believe that it is just **THIS** case and that once the case is solved Kurt will go back to being the person they perceive him to be. After several cancellations for dinner, the calls in the middle of the night that have him dashing away, and their inability to pry him away for a vacation the women start to realize that this is the way Wallander is all the time and there is no chance of them changing him into the man they want him to be.

His mind is too inverted to share his thoughts with colleagues or with people who care about him. He may stop mid-sentence to follow another clue that has suddenly clicked into place leaving the person he was talking with hanging on his last word, desperately wishing they could be a part of the world in Wallander's head. I sometimes feel the need to give Kurt a good shake, but if I am found deceased under suspicious circumstances there is no doubt in my mind I want Wallander on the case.

### **Ystad, Sweden the setting for the Wallander series**

When I started this book I thought it would be a good place for anyone to ease into the Wallander series, but after reading it I believe that readers will like this book more after they have read a couple of the novels.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>  
I also have a Facebook blogger page at:<https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

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### **????????? ?????? says**

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### **Jessica says**

disappointing...though I'm a Wallander fan, these stories which follow Wallander's early career (written later) seemed mechanical, uninspired, the prose flat and unadorned. Some stories were better than others (wish I could remember which now). Mankell does better with novel-length mysteries than with stories I think. Just skip to the novels\*. They vary in quality, but are generally much more absorbing and fun reads.

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*\*I'm referring here to his procedural detective novels, the Wallander books, not his 'literary' novels, of which he has several. These can be trying as well...*

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## **Brad says**

I am closing in on the end of my time with Kurt Wallander -- only a couple of books to go after this -- and I am a little sad to be saying goodbye to the depressing Swedish cop. As Mankell says, "It is the fans who will miss Wallander." Just so.

This volume is a nice beginning of the end for me. A stack of stories that span Wallander's career and give some fantastic insights into his character. It has the added benefit of being the perfect book for a vacation trip: five self-contained mysteries, five perfectly digestible mini-Wallander tales. This is a summer read extraordinaire.

### Wallander's First Case --

The mystery itself is interesting enough, and the early hints of Wallander's uneasy relationship with the rules is just what I expected, but what made me devour this story was the abuse of Wallander at the hands and tongue of Mona, who would become his wife then ex-wife, and the abuse of Wallander at the tongue of his not yet dementia reduced father. So much of Wallander's personal life, so much of his failures as a friend and father and lover, so much of his obsession with the lonely victims he comes across, is tied up in these two unhealthy relationships. When Kurt is thinking of breaking it off with Mona, is then afraid that Mona will break it off with him, all I could think was, "Christ, YES! End it. Let it end," and when Kurt considers never seeing his father again, considers cutting off the old man after a particularly nasty bit of passive aggressive manipulation, I was thinking the same thing. Of course, I know Kurt's going to go ahead and make his mistakes, but it didn't stop me wishing for a different outcome.

Slightly aside: this story takes place in the early seventies, and I couldn't help wondering when Martin Beck was going to show up. He never did, but I dearly wanted him to. I wonder how hard it was for Mankell to keep Beck out of the story?

### The Man with the Mask --

This tight, taut little story kept me in mind of Sjowall and Wahloo's Martin Beck mysteries. Only this time, I couldn't help noticing how much the character of Wallander owes to Sjowall and Wahloo's chief protagonists, Martin Beck and Lennart Kollberg. The pair are partners and completely realized characters in their own rights -- not mere archetypes -- but much that Wallander is, especially in this story, can be found in those men. He is a complex blending of the two, and when this story engages in a consideration of apartheid South Africa (did this early case of Wallander's ever come up in *The White Lioness*?) with the young dissident turned murderer Mankell's debt to the Martin Beck novels comes into sharp relief.

### The Man on the Beach --

There is a lot of suicide going on in this book, but somehow that feels perfectly in place with the mood that the Wallander books have created through the years. The bleak landscape of rural Sweden might make suicide seem fitting, but I think it is more about the quiet despair of people living rurally in a modern society than about the space they live in. It certainly feels that way to me in this story where murder comes first, then suicide follows as a result. This is the most depressing story of the bunch -- so far.

## The Death of the Photographer --

Two things:

1. It never ceases to amaze me when an author hits on something that speaks to me directly. It is why I read, I suspect.

"He must have been crazy in his own way,' Hansson said. 'To spend his spare time distorting images of well known people.'

'Perhaps the explanation is quite different,: Rydberg suggested. 'Perhaps there are people in today's society that feel so powerless they no longer partake in what we call democratic society. Instead, they devote themselves to rites. If this is the case, our nation is in trouble."

2. If you've read the Wallander books to this point you are aware of what has gone on between Martinsson and Wallander(view spoiler) Once again these stories show that their true worth is what they tell us about Wallander and his relationships.

## The Pyramid --

This felt much more like the Wallander stories I'm used to. I think this is both because the story directly precedes Faceless Killers, so all of his relationships are reaching the place I am familiar with, and because the story was much longer than the other four in this volume, putting it closer to the level of plot complexity in the novels.

Yet I don't think this is the best story in the book. In fact, it almost felt like this story was something discarded rather than a story that Mankell felt he really needed to tell. The other short stories felt like little explorations that Mankell needed to produce for himself, but they were complete and packed enough of worth that Mankell could share them without reservation. The Pyramid, however, felt like an idea Mankell played with but couldn't imbue with enough complexity to suit his needs, an idea that aspired to but didn't reach the high standard of plotting in his other Wallander novels, an idea that took much too much of Mankell's writing energy to simply let go and was published merely to clear the docket.

Still, I am glad I read it if only for Rydberg, Martinsson, Linda and Wallander's father. More time with them all is appreciated by me, and I can't wait to see what Linda is like as the protagonist in Before the Frost. I hope she isn't just a copy of her Dad.

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## **Tittirossa says**

L'unica cosa negativa di questo libro è che forse non ci saranno più indagini dell'Ispettore Wallander! Per il resto è ottimo, come tutti gli altri. Anche se immaginarsi Wallander a 20 anni è un po' difficile, di lui rimane impressa indelebilmente la pancetta, ed i suoi tentativi di mangiare in modo più equilibrato. 4 racconti eccellenti che gettano luce su alcuni dei comprimari: la figura del padre che si arrampica sulle piramidi è strepitosa, Mona ne esce già antipatica, e Rydberg finalmente lo vediamo in azione. Da leggere e gustare.

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## John says

The PBS series starring Kenneth Brannagh got me interested in Wallander, but reading this book really got me hooked. This seemed like a great place to start, as the stories fill in some of the gaps in Wallander's career as a rookie cop, and then later working his way up the ranks. On that score, there seems to be a pretty big temporal leap from "rookie" Wallander to the nearly fully realized one, but I guess an author can only write the stories he's inspired to write. As much or more as they fill in Wallander's history, they fill in the history of the Sweden in which he works and lives. As in the case of the TV episodes I've seen, some stories are definitely better than others; likewise, one story has a rather abrupt and unsatisfying end. Having said that, the good stories are really good. It's a bit strange to say, but part of the appeal for me is the existential dreariness. This isn't a quirky detective who is appealing in his eccentricities or his sheer brilliance. Neither does Wallander get your attention for any negative reason like meanness, corruption, or a scathing personality. Instead, Wallander is just a decent and terribly ordinary person, stuck in a situation where so much goes wrong in the world at large and in his personal relationships like the rest of us. And, like the rest of us, when the floods of trouble come and strain at the personal and societal walls erected to hold it back, he sticks his fingers in the dykes and tries to stem the tide. He does it even when it seems hopeless - to us the reader, or even to himself in his more conscious moments. He does it because he knows it's all he can do. Being a detective is all he's really good at, and so he perseveres in it and tries to find his way thus. I really like the characters, the writing, the setting, and can't wait to read more.

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## Rowena Hoseason says

The essence of small-town Scandi crime is distilled into this collection of five shorter Wallander stories, all set in the years before the full-length novels. These standalone mysteries almost act like a 'secret origin' series as the detective's keynote characteristics become increasingly apparent in each episode.

Each of the stories showcases an intriguing investigation – they're worth reading even if you're not so familiar with Mankell's typical mix of murder amid daily mundanity. In fact the shorter form places more emphasis on the plot than on interminable social concerns – which are a key concern for several Scandi crime authors but which can get a bit tiresome when they overshadow the story. In this collection, each mystery is satisfactorily balanced by insights into Wallander's quirky personal life without getting bogged down.

Refreshing, and ideal to read in shorter sessions.

8/10

There are many more crime / thriller reviews over at <http://www.murdermayhemandmore.net>

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## Ubik 2.0 says

### Inquietudine svedese (schegge di Wallander)

*I Romanzi dell'inquietudine svedese* è l'appropriato sottotitolo che lo stesso Mankell attribuisce, proprio nella premessa a *Piramide*, alla serie del Commissario Wallander.

Anche per questo motivo, dopo aver molto apprezzato tutti i precedenti, è stato con sorpresa e un certo disappunto che ho scoperto che questo penultimo episodio della saga non è affatto un romanzo compiuto come gli altri, bensì un frammentario assemblaggio di storie di varia misura, già edite eccetto due, ambientate in vari periodi della carriera del protagonista: una short story, alcuni racconti lunghi e un romanzo breve che fornisce il titolo alla raccolta. Per di più l'autore candidamente ammette di avere *“ripulito i cassetti, frugato fra mucchi di carte polverose o sui dischetti alla ricerca di tracce di Wallander”*, che è esattamente l'impressione prodotta da questo libro...

Tralasciando tali aspetti, che comunque rendono l'operazione in sè inutile e piuttosto incomprensibile, si constata che questa serie di racconti, ognuno dei quali comincia ed è impostato a tutti gli effetti in “stile Wallander” per poi concludersi alla bell'e meglio, dà un senso di “scatola di montaggio” che davvero non si addice a un autore celebre per l'accuratezza e la verosimiglianza di storie sviluppate nei tempi lunghi e altalenanti che riproducono le complessità, le frustrazioni e i contrattempi propri di un'inchiesta reale.

Fra le intercapedini dell'indagine poliziesca affiorano come in passato le traversie della vita privata di Wallander, nei suoi rapporti difficili con le donne, col padre, con l'alimentazione e con la Svezia intera, e dei suoi colleghi (la salute di Rydqvist, l'efficienza di Nyberg, la scarsa dedizione al lavoro di Hansson) ma sembrano accenni dovuti, tanto per appagare la sete dei fans più affezionati, (un po' come gli strafalcioni di Catarella o le scappatelle di Mimì Augello...).

Insomma, Piramide è stato per me un libro deludente che non appassiona neanche un po', salvo fugacemente negli incipit che fanno immaginare come potrebbe svilupparsi ogni racconto se non risultasse alla fine poco più di una traccia.

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### **Marsena Adams-Dufresne says**

I am loathe to give this book only two stars because Henning Mankell is one of my favorite mystery authors and I eagerly await new installments (i.e., translations) with his character, Kurt Wallander. (How thrilling to discover a PBS Mystery series of Wallander, played by Kenneth Brannagh!)

This book includes four stories that go back to the beginning of Wallander's career as an investigator, supposedly fleshing out those experiences that the other books only allude to. But I keep thinking that there must have been a reason why Mankell started the Wallander series where he did. A reason to let the beginning stay off the page, except to provide depth and texture to the here and now.

There is far too much telling for these stories to feel fully fleshed, which is a grave disappointment. Rather than being in the middle of it with Wallander, I feel as if I'm sitting in a room with the author, who is telling me, "and then, and then..." in a slightly bored manner. I don't want that much distance between me and a character.

I didn't abandon the book, out of respect for both Mankell and Wallander, but if you haven't read any of the Kurt Wallander mysteries, you'd be better off picking a different one to start with.

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## Beth says

THE PYRAMID is a collection of 5 short mysteries by which Henning Mankell introduces us to Kurt Wallender when he is a 21 year-old patrolman investigating the first homicide of his career. In a foreword, Mankell explains that he has received many inquiries over the years about what happened to Wallender in the years before he receives the phone call that begins the first book in the series, FACELESS KILLERS.

Mankell acknowledges that there have been inconsistencies in Wallender's story as it stretches across the eight book series and he tries to resolve them in these stories.

FACELESS KILLERS begins on January 8, 1990 when Wallender is almost 43 years old. "Wallender's First Case" takes place when Wallender is a 21 year-old patrolman in Malmö, just beginning his relationship with Mona, the woman he will marry. Artur Halen is a very private man who lives across the hall from Wallender. One night Wallender hears what sounds like a gunshot and, when he investigates, he finds Halen's door ajar and his body on the floor. The death is ruled a suicide but Wallender isn't convinced and he decides to investigate on his own time, acting against the rules of the police department.

In the second story, "The Man with the Mask", it is Christmas Eve 1975 and Wallender is in a hurry to get home to Mona and his 5 year-old daughter, Linda. Just as he is leaving his office, his supervisor, Hemberg, asks him to make a stop at a grocery store that is on his way home. The owner, an elderly woman, has called reporting the presence of a man who seems just to be waiting outside her store. Wallender agrees to make the stop and a tragedy unfolds as he confronts a man overtaken by circumstances.

Mankell jumps forward to April, 1987 for "The Man on the Beach". Wallender is now a chief inspector in Ystad, he is nearly middle-aged and his marriage is failing. Hansson, a colleague, asks Wallender to meet him at the local hospital so that he can hear a very strange story from Stenberg, a taxi driver. The driver describes collecting a fare in a nearby town for a trip to Ystad. Stenberg believed the man had fallen asleep in the backseat but when they arrive in Ystad, the man is dead. Wallender and his team learn that the man's name was Alexandersson, that he owned a small business, lived in Stockholm, was divorced, and was the father of one child, a son who had died 7 years previously. Alexandersson had been staying in Ystad for the past week and each day a taxi took him to Svarte, dropped him off at the edge of the village early in the morning and then a taxi returned him to Ystad in the late afternoon. While in Svarte, Alexandersson walked on the beach. The team is unsure what it is they need to do about this case until they learn that there was poison in Alexandersson's system. Did he commit suicide or was he murdered? As the story unfolds, Wallender finds himself caught in a story of obsession and love.

"The Death of the Photographer" takes place in April, 1988. Wallender and Mona are separated and he is trying to re-establish a relationship with his daughter, Linda. Early one morning in the middle of April, the body of Simon Lamberg is found in his photography studio. Lamberg was as close to an official photographer for the city of Ystad as anyone could be; he had taken Wallender's wedding photos when he and Mona had married in 1970. The early investigation reveals only one odd thing in what was a very regular life – Lamberg took newspaper photos of prominent leaders in the government and community, including Wallender's, and used the tools of his trade to turn the faces into grotesques, pictures which he saved in albums. That hobby seemed harmless and there didn't seem to be anything else to warrant his violent death. As the investigation proceeds, the police learn that Lamberg had a daughter who had been born with severe mental and physical handicaps. Until she was 4 she had been cared for at home but then it was necessary to have her placed in a hospital. Lamberg never visited her; her only visitors were her mother and a woman whose identity was unknown. Wallender refuses to believe that a man whose life was so normal, so regular could be the victim of a brutal attack such as the one that killed him. He is not surprised when, as he ends the case, he discovers that the motive was jealousy and revenge from a very unexpected quarter.

The final story in the book is also titled "The Pyramid" and it is in this story that Mankell examines

Wallender's relationship with his father, the eccentric painter of landscapes, with and without a grouse. On the 11th of December, 1989, a small plane drops from the sky and crashes in a forest far from any runway. The two men on board are killed, leaving nothing to identify them. It is quickly determined that this plane, not appearing on radar as it flew into Swedish air space, was carrying a load of drugs. Wallender is beginning this investigation when the sewing shop and home of two sisters catches fire, killing them. It is quickly ruled arson but why would anyone have anything against two seemingly pleasant old ladies? As Wallender tries to make sense of both cases, he gets hit with a third problem. His father has gone to Egypt to fulfill a dream to see the pyramids. Wallender is surprised by his father's decision but not nearly as surprised as when he receives a telephone call from the police in Cairo reporting that his father has been jailed for trying to climb the ancient monuments. Wallender didn't realize his father's dream was actually to stand on top of a pyramid and the old man is not pleased that his son comes to rescue him.

Of the 5 stories, I enjoyed the last the most as Mankell resolves the pyramid. All of the stories are equally well-written and Mankell does a superb job creating Wallender's back story. In the foreword, Mankell writes that the Wallender novels have served as a means to examine the relationship between the Swedish welfare state and democracy. While others may have grasped this subtext I did not. I have simply enjoyed some of the best written, most engaging mystery novels available today. The date of the foreword is January, 1999. I wonder what Wallender would make of 21st century Sweden.

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### **Carolyn says**

Kurt Wallander isn't just my favorite fictional detective. He's one of my favorite characters from any book. When I finished *Before the Frost* a few years ago, my heart sank at the realization that there was no more Wallander available. I missed his company. I missed hanging out at the Ystad police station with him, drinking endless cups of coffee, having meeting after meeting with colleagues in which the facts of a case are pored over yet again, in the hopes that this time, something new will be revealed.

His strength comes from his ordinariness. Many famous detectives have flaws or quirks, but I've never encountered one as believable and complex as Wallander. He doesn't suffer from obsessive compulsive disorder. He's not a genius. He's just a man. He has a strained relationship with his father. Like many of us, he carries around an unfulfilled dream. In the midst of dealing with tracking down murderers, he also has to contend with loads of laundry he can't find time to do, car problems, toothaches--the mundane problems of everyday life. And Mankell's straightforward prose doesn't try to impart any more drama to these events than they deserve. Their ability to draw us in is largely in their normalcy.

The five stories in the collection *The Pyramid* are set before our famous introduction to Wallander on January 8th, 1990 in *Faceless Killers*, portraying him at various stages from his earliest months as a police officer to the weeks immediately prior to the events of that first Wallander novel. The first story here, in which Wallander independently and somewhat recklessly endeavors to solve a crime involving one of his neighbors, didn't do that much for me, perhaps because it lacked the collaborative crime-solving efforts that are so central to the Wallander novels. The second isn't a mystery at all, but rather a very short story about a dangerous situation in which Wallander finds himself one night.

It's with the third story that things begin to resemble the Wallander novels. I found the third story interesting but not especially satisfying. The fourth story is rather good, though I think it also exemplifies the biggest weakness in the Wallander stories: Mankell's desire to explicitly state the ways in which these crimes reflect larger social problems. Great crime fiction often should serve as an exploration of larger social problems. (See HBO's *The Wire*.) But that exploration should come naturally out of the events of the story, and the

ramifications of those events should be left to the reader (or viewer) to reflect upon. When cops sit around saying things like, "Perhaps there are people in today's society that feel so powerless they no longer partake in what we call democratic society," I stop hearing the characters talking and start hearing Mankell grinding his social axe.

The fifth and longest story here, from which the collection takes its name, is outstanding. I might rank it as better than some of the Wallander novels. It's got all the puzzling turns of events, family problems, sleepless nights, meetings and cups of coffee I could hope for in a Wallander. I would probably still encourage people to start with Faceless Killers, as I think Wallander's entrance into the annals of detective fiction is terrifically memorable. But The Pyramid is an excellent entry in the Wallander series.

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## **Mal Warwick says**

What is it about Swedish mystery writers?

First (at least in my consciousness) there were the ten Martin Beck police procedurals of Maj Sjowall and Per Wahloo, published from 1965 to 1975. Now we flock to bookstores and movie theaters to enter the world of Lisbeth Salander and Mikael Blomqvist, who sprang from the mind of the late Stieg Larsson in the captivating form of the Millennium Trilogy.

In between there was Kurt Wallender, the moody small-town police inspector created by another masterful Swedish writer, Henning Mankell. Wallender made his first appearance (in English) in 1997 in the novel Faceless Killers. Wallender lived on through seven other novels, the last of which, Firewall, appeared in English translation in 2002. (An eighth, and reportedly last, Wallender novel is due in 2011 under the title The Troubled Man.) The series has won numerous awards and gained a large audience in the English-speaking world -- deservedly so, in my opinion.

The Pyramid is something of an afterthought but no less worth reading than the Wallender novels. It's a collection of five stories that span the time from Wallender's rookie year on the police force until the period when, a mature and respected inspector, the crimes detailed in Faceless Killers took place. As he ages from his early 20s to his 50s, Wallender grows increasingly morose in the face of his dysfunctional family relationships and the senseless crimes he is called upon to solve. The Pyramid lays bare the roots of his problems. For any Kurt Wallender fan, it's well worth reading.

Mankell is a serious writer. Like Sjowall, Wahloo, and Larsson, he is a man of the Left, and his writing explores the changes in Swedish society that have come about under the impact of drugs, immigration, and the newly competitive political environment which has brought conservatives as well as socialists into power.

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