



The Bad Book Affair

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“[Israel’s] fish-out-of-water dilemmas and encounters with kooky locals will resonate with Alexander McCall Smith fans.” —*Publishers Weekly*

Author Ian Sansom “clearly loves a good laugh” (*Washington Post*), as his delightful mystery series featuring rumples, fish-out-of-water, Jewish vegetarian librarian Israel Armstrong indisputably proves. *The Bad Book Affair* is Israel’s fourth hilarious adventure as he tools around Ireland in a rattletrap bookmobile trying to solve the mystery of a missing teenage girl while trying to keep his mess of a personal life in order. Sansom’s Mobile Library Mystery series has made a big splash with critics on both sides of “the Pond.” The *New York Times Book Review* loves their “formidable reserves of insight and humor,” while the *London Times* calls Israel “one of the most original and exciting amateur sleuths around.”

The Bad Book Affair Details

Date : Published January 19th 2010 by Harper Paperbacks (first published 2009)

ISBN : 9780061452017

Author : Ian Sansom

Format : Paperback 228 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Cultural, Ireland, Writing, Books About Books

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Cynthia says

I confess that I didn't give this one much of a chance. I tossed it after about three chapters. It isn't necessarily the book's fault. The main character, Israel Armstrong, seems to be an amalgam of two people: my teenage daughter and my most troublesome employee.

On top of that, the book was very slow to start, because the author seemed to be having so much fun being cute and clever. I needed a more aggressive plot line to propel me past the descriptions of Israel, which made me feel like I should stop reading and go be a better mother and/or a better boss. Someday, when my daughter has a job and is happily living in her own home, and when my employee has either moved on to another job or got his act together, perhaps I will pick this book up again, and if I do, I'm sure I will enjoy it.

Susan Ackland says

This was a pleasant read, with the humor arising from the cultural misunderstandings of the neurotic, uselessly literate main character and the natives of the small, rural town where he has somehow become marooned. The fact that Israel Armstrong is a Jewish vegetarian in an environment where no one else is either Jewish or vegetarian is more of a literary mechanism than a deep driver of the character. He seems hardly more than nominally (pun intended) Jewish and his vegetarianism is insignificant in terms of the story. The main point is that he is obviously a transplant and the thing that really makes him different is his urban (London) background and his aimless literary dreaminess -- traits the local environment does not support. One of the elements that made me laugh out loud was the author's name dropping. So, for example, Israel imagines a movie script written about his life and his cast includes a part for Steve Busceme (among other current actors he names). This is great fun now -- these jokes will be lost on readers 40 years from now, but I guess the author is not striving for literary immortality. All in all, I had a good time with this book.

Kayla says

If I could give this no stars I would. Very slow plot. It takes a 3rd of the book to get to a main plot point that is listed in the first few lines of the synopsis. I couldn't finish this and doubt I'll try to finish it later.

Starry says

This series of novels by Ian Sansone tell of Israel Armstrong, an agonizingly self-questioning, almost-30-year-old London man who moves to a remote village in Northern Ireland. Israel lives in a not-yet-converted chicken coop on a farm (a home he doesn't really like) and drives the book mobile (a job he doesn't really like) and spends most of his time feeling out of place and introspective (ie, self-centered) and vaguely depressed, like everyone his age apparently feels these days.

Comments:

These books are billed as mysteries but shouldn't be read as such -- meaning, you'll be frustrated if you are looking for a great mystery. The solutions are simple, the process is non-existent (no one goes about solving it rationally; many important questions go unanswered), and the main character spends most of his time navel-gazing and haplessly getting into binds. The mystery, like the book mobile, is merely a vehicle for telling a story about Israel Armstrong.

These books can be very funny. The author works in some hilarious dialog and reflections of a Jewish, vegetarian Londoner on the culture/dialect of Northern Ireland. However, I often found myself reading along, thinking "this is so funny" or "I will highly recommend this book" -- and then the author took it too far or carried on for too long until it was no longer funny, like a little kid that gets a laugh from her parents so she says her funny line again. And again. And again. All the same, I did get some good laughs from this book.

Be forewarned that the author is also a literary critic. Sometimes this can be funny and insightful, but other times it borders on offensive and seems almost like taking advantage of the reader to air his opinions.

I also was confused by the author's impressions of the religious culture in North Ireland. Sometimes, he has the local minister give the straight-up gospel (and I'm not sure why he includes long quotations from the sermons; are they meant to be satirical? or simply recording what one might hear?), other times the minister lapses into the very humanist "I-don't-really-believe-this-stuff-but-I-say-it-because-it's-nice-and-makes-everyone-feel-good." Ugh. Sorry, but that's a pet peeve of mine.

Recommendation: I recommend these but not as mysteries. And don't read too many in a row.

Susan Johnson says

I can't believe I read the entire book. It was just so awful. The so called plot didn't even start until half-way through the book. The characters were one dimensional. The lead one was made a Jewish vegetarian for no apparent reason. Maybe it was supposed to be exotic but since I'm from CA., it didn't seem exotic at all. There is no sense of place. It was set in Northern Ireland but could have taken place anywhere. It would have been exactly the same in Baltimore or Perth or where ever. Some reviewers called it funny which surprised me. It was not funny at all. If you want to try a funny mystery try the ones Brad Parks writes but please stay away from this one.

Stephanie says

Israel Armstrong sets out to find the daughter of a local political who disappeared after he loaned her one of the 'Unshelved' from his mobile library. The 'Unshelved' are books that are not considered appropriate for young impressionable minds and Israel receives a lot of flack for loaning a young girl one of these novels. Along the way, we are introduced to a variety of characters who help Israel discover the whereabouts of the missing girl.

As a mystery novel, I was very disappointed in this novel. There was very little mystery in the classic sense of a detective novel and what little there was, was very predictable. The story tended to revolve more around Israel's depressed state surrounding the recent break-up with his girlfriend Gloria, turning 30, living in

norther Ireland, and having to deal with being only a mobile librarian for the rest of his life. While there were some very witty and humorous moments in this novel, anyone who has Sansom would expect no less, it would be more appropriate to say this book is about Israel's purpose in life and the philosophies surrounding that purpose. If you are looking for a detective novel, you will not find it in this one. Hopefully, Sansom will get it back in his next novel.

Shawna Millard says

Reading this book is like reading a screen play except without any suspense, enlightenment, excitement, or fun. I did actually finish it but it never improved. The ending was quite a let down. The main character is a lay-about, dump on everyone else major jerk and I couldn't stand him. There was definitely nothing in this book to capture the imagination or keep me remotely interested.

Nadine Hiemstra says

A cute and funny book! Not of much substance, I'm afraid, but I was entertained. Good for a light holiday read.

Sterlingcindysu says

3.5 rounded up. A very funny book, one to consider when you're tired of WWII and family angst serious fiction. You don't need to read the others in a series to get the grist of this. In fact, the "mystery" part of this is very, very weak. And no, it's not about a "bad" book having an affair, although it is considered an adult book.

The best character to me was Ted, the driver (vs. the librarian) of the mobile library. Every comment he spoke with odd Irish words and when asked to explain, would use another odd Irish word. Even his insults sounded cute, "Aye, but you were a wee ball of lard to be sure."

The librarian, Israel seemed to know the way to approach everyone is to say, "I'm a librarian" (and even when a gamer asks, "I didn't know there were any of you around anymore" he's not insulted.) He states early on that his responsibility is to the books in his care, not the people...I'm sure glad the children's librarians feel differently at my library because those books don't have much of a chance.

Derek Baldwin says

A rather slight story and some Father Ted-isms can't take away the fact that this is a very funny and entertaining book, despite my having never read any of the earlier novels with the same character(s). Israel

Armstrong is a believable and sympathetic character haplessly trying to fit in and never able to do so, but well-intentioned, and certainly persistent. What's best about this book though are the set-piece satirical sequences: an annual appraisal interview which resembles all those annual appraisal meetings you've ever attended, only much worse; an interview with a Schismatic preacher who is convinced, for example, that self-harming is a sin because it's a form of sacrifice and only heathens do such things; encounters with a smarmy local politician on the election trail. Plus some fun tilting at windmills: Harry Potter novels, Alexander McCall Smith novels, pub food (the vegetarian option being crab paste sandwiches, seemingly), and the difference being Goths and Emos. Plenty of funny one-liners too, and recurring jokes, for example the phrase that seems to disarm and unlock the defences of all the people Israel interviews in his quest to solve a mystery: "I'm a librarian..." I'm not sure I'd go out of my way to read more of these but should I chance upon a copy in a charity shop or (like this battered copy) on the "withdrawn" table at the library, I'll certainly shell out my 50p and very likely get more than my money's worth. I'd recommend you do too.

Roberta says

Israel è sempre più incasinato, la sua vita è un autentica altalena di eventi e sparizioni, apparentemente senza senso.

Questa volta dovrà confrontarsi con la scomparsa di una ragazzina a cui ha prestato un libro "Pastorale americana" e ovviamente verrà accusato di essere in qualche modo collegato agli eventi.

Per di più in tutto ciò deve vedersela con l'ex fidanzata Gloria, ma una festa di compleanno da organizzare non sarà sufficiente...

Un libro divertente e decisamente bizzarro, perfettamente in linea con tutta la saga! Mi ha proprio rallegrato in questi giorni di umore altalenante e di stress! Lo consiglio per chi è alla ricerca di una lettura leggera

Sandy Green says

Israel Armstrong is an hilarious character, but also quite sweet and full of conflict and good intentions.

Sarah says

Not marvellous nor memorable.

Sandra Guerfi says

Israel Armstrong once again is taking us along for a twisty, hilarious ride as he shambles his way through a somewhat depressive yet completely relatable period of mourning for his broken relationship. With feelings of failure, road to nowhere dumps and I could have been a contender vibes, Israel is hardly the detective that most of us would think of as the hero of a book, yet his feet of clay are what make these stories so endearing. Along with the many other characters that people his stories, Sansom manages to create books that bare the bones of humanity yet forgive us enough to let us see the humor in our very downfall.

In this particular case, Israel is at the very epicenter of what one might call a literary faux pas. A young girl

is missing and the last time anyone saw her was when Israel handed her a book from the Unshelved, books that are technically not supposed to be on loan from the mobile library at all. But it's hardly his fault is it, after all it was just some Goth. But when it turns out the girl is actually the daughter of a local politician, Israel becomes the prime suspect again. It seems that life has a place for Israel after all.

Full of the ups and downs of life, written with wry humor, and fleshed out with mysteries that ask your little grey cells to wiggle, these books are a sure fire hit for any reader. Grab one, prepare to chuckle and ask yourself why you aren't driving a book mobile in the vast wilderness of Northern Ireland.

Lemar says

“Israel avoided uplifting, joyous, life-affirming reads”. This last of Ian Sansom’s mobile librarian series do I reluctantly said goodbye to its hero Israel Armstrong, with whom a local Northern Ireland teenager converses, “only because you are a librarian slash detective. You guys are an endangered species.”

The book is an odd mix of P.G. Wodehouse humor, it is often laugh out loud funny, and the serious depiction of a young uncompromising man trying to find his place in the world. There is a strong element of Don Quixote in Israel, the possibly depressed Jewish, vegetarian librarian. On some level he feels that books perpetuate a dangerous fantasy that we will all find our fated, glorious purpose. Yet he defends our right to freedom of choice. Israel fights against banning of books, lending to those who request them the Unshelved books in his mobile library, books that the powers that be would happily and self-righteously censor entirely. The character George, the young woman struggling to keep the family farm afloat is the wise soul of the book. I would love to see her take her place as protagonist of future books. I will miss these characters and the inhabitants of the small town of Tumdrum in Northern Ireland.
