

American Day: Book Reviews

The Talented Mr. Ripley by Patricia Highsmith

Do you like thrillers and detective stories? Making deductions throughout the whole book to make guesses who the murderer is? Well, you will be surprised by this book because it is the other way around. *The Talented Mr. Ripley* written by Patricia Highsmith in 1955 is about a young man called Tom Ripley. Living in New York he muddles through life by casual work and frauds. One day an elder man follows him until there is no way to get around a conversation with him. Turns out that, Herbert Greenleaf, a wealthy shipyard owner, asks Tom to travel to Italy to persuade his son Dickie to come back to New York to take over the business. Happy about this welcome diversion Tom soon finds himself in Mongibello, a small Italian village, where Dickie and his girlfriend Marge Sherwood live. Tom gains Dickie's trust and soon they become good friends. At some point he tells him about Dickie's father and his offer. They decide to play a trick on him so that Tom lives a happy life with Dickie while still receiving money from his father. But how long is this going to work? After a while Tom realises how much he actually likes Dickie, however, at some point Freddie Miles, a friend of Dickie's, shows up and soon Tom feels jealous of Freddie for gaining all of Dickie's attention. Unfortunately, Dickie's father decides to not send Tom anymore checks because he does not believe that he can convince Dickie and even worse Dickie does not want Tom to stay any longer. When making a final trip to San Remo, Tom makes a terrible decision, which will change his life forever: the two rent a boat and as they are floating on the deep waters Tom hits Dickie several times with an oar until he dies. Tom, being a cool-headed individual, he soon masquerades as Dickie and lives a life in Rome full of happiness while spending Dickie's money, but soon Dickie's friends get suspicious and events take their course... Will Tom make it out or will the police catch him for that justice is done? Read this interesting and twisted book to find out...

The thing I enjoyed most while reading was how your own perspective changes over time. At first you don't like Tom as a main character but while reading you start to understand him, you understand him and his feelings. However, you also adore him for his cool-headed mind and his gift of always keeping the overview and planning things ahead. The funny thing is, you don't even realise how you start liking him until you notice that you don't want him to be caught by the police. This was the exact point when I started to question my morals and wondered whether I just wanted a murderer to get away and the frightening thing is, yes, I did. And that is the exact reason I enjoyed reading this book so much. It turns your perspective upside down, making you question everything you believe in.

I also want to mention the film 'The Talented Mr. Ripley' from 1999 with a famous cast including Matt Damon (Tom Ripley), Jude Law (Dickie Greenleaf), Gwyneth Paltrow (Marge Sherwood) and Cate Blanchett in the main roles. I recommend this film, too, by presenting the feelings of the main character even better through the skills of a very talented actor as well as a wonderful scenery. (However, be careful: the film differs from the book in some aspects but still includes the majority of the plot). To be honest, this is one of my absolutely favourite films and it would be a shame if you missed it.

The Martian by Andy Weir

Ever thought about visiting foreign planets? Exploring space? Maybe meeting aliens? Yes? Then I'm very sure you will enjoy this book. *The Martian* written by Andy Weir in 2014 deal with a group of scientist visiting the red planet until a heavy sandstorm spoils their plans so that they have to evacuate and return to Earth. However, Mark Watney, the botanist and main character, gets hit by a flying metal piece so that he loses consciousness while his crew mates think that he is dead and decide to leave him behind. When he wakes up, he finds himself lying hurt and alone in the sand of the planet Mars, millions of miles away from home. Having only a limited amount of food, some broken devices, no means of communication and nobody, not even his crew or Houston, knowing that he is still alive he tries to survive and to get off this planet.

While reading this book you realise how easy *Robinson Crusoe* it actually had. Experiencing how a character lives through this madness, not giving up, not minding these circumstances and dealing with an enormous psychological stress you notice how important human interaction is (although, I know, that we could also do without a few individuals, but still) and what it actually means to live on this planet (even during *Corona*). I know that at some point it might get a little bit boring because Mark explains all his scientific ideas and I had no idea what he was talking about (but, seriously, you can just skip that), however, it is also very funny by seeing how he tries to overplay his loneliness with his sarcastic humour making it funny and interesting to read. The majority of the book is written in form of logbooks entries while also showing some scenes on Earth. I recommend you to read this fascinating science-fiction book, showing the battle of one man against a whole planet that will kill him sooner or later. And in case you ever go on a space exploration and visit Mars on the way, just do yourself a favour and take that book with you, okay?

Oh, and I also wanted to mention that the book was filmed in 2015 with Matt Damon in the main role (again, I know ;)) portraying the feelings of Mark Watney in such an unbelievable accurate way that you almost forget you are not on Mars.

Angels & Demons by Dan Brown

Conspiracies. One of the most interesting conversation topics I could think of and I remember the times when almost everyone was talking about the Illuminati and how they will take over the world... and you know what? Dan Brown makes all your wildest fantasies come true in *Angels and Demons*. It is the first book in which the reader gets to know Robert Langdon, a Harvard professor and expert of symbology, who gets a request to visit the CERN (yes, the one in Switzerland) because it was turned into a crime scene. One of the leading experts of nuclear research and priest, Leonardo Vetra, was killed and the word 'Illuminati' was burnt on his chest. Even worse, Leonardo's adoptive daughter Vittoria explains that she and her father succeeded to produce antimatter, a substance that immediately detonates when it gets in touch with matter and the amount they produced is big enough to destroy a whole city. The order of the Illuminati wants revenge for the persecution in the 16th century and have therefore planned to destroy Vatican City with the antimatter placed somewhere close. But before that they want to humiliate the Church even more by having kidnapped the four preferiti, the favourite candidates who are most likely to win the oncoming papal elections. The assassin plans to start at 8 p.m. by killing one of them every full hour on the four 'altars of science' each of them representing one element (earth, air, fire and water) and placed in four churches in Rome out of 900 churches in total. The chance to be at the right church in time is very little and Langdon is the only one who can find the 'Path of Illumination', an ancient path through Rome which was used by the order to introduce new members by finding it and directly leading to the altars. Can Langdon find the churches in time to save the four men and Vatican City by finding the path the assassin uses and the bomb in time? A thrilling chase through whole Rome keeps the reader fascinated throughout the whole book while still having a lot of surprising shocking and sometimes sacrilegious turns.

Angels and Demons is one of my absolutely favourite stories because it deals with the conflict between religion and science, the new technology of antimatter and the idea of how much power mankind actually owns as well as how some people believe to possess the power of God. All of these topics are fascinating, somewhat philosophical but still one of my favourite issues to think about. It makes you feel somewhat uncomfortable knowing that a tiny particle of antimatter has the same power as a Hiroshima bomb. Just that you know: scientist at the CERN succeeded in producing antimatter which is basically identical with normal matter unless that all the particles have the opposite electric charge. If it comes into contact with matter (even air) it immediately reacts and releases a lot of energy. Therefore, antimatter is the most powerful energy source to ever be created by mankind. The more, it releases no radiation or pollution as you might think and might be the solution to all of our energy problems, air pollution and energy waste, however, it can also be turned into the deadliest and most horrific weapon humanity has ever seen. Funnily, 70 years ago somebody said something similar about an element called uranium, you might have heard of it, and now you can imagine what antimatter could be used for if it falls into the wrong hands... And this is why I love this book. It makes you perceive the world on a greater scale and think about the possibilities of science. Maybe we are already as mighty as gods.

I also want to point out that you should not miss the film from 2009 with an all-star cast including (no, this time it is not Matt Damon ;) Tom Hanks (Robert Langdon), Ayelet Zurer (Vittoria Vetra) and Ewan McGregor (Camerlengo). I can only recommend it because it is as thrilling as the book itself and it is a wonderful film for a Friday evening