

The Girl With All The Gifts by M R Carey and The Book Thief by Markus Zusak

Summer is here, supposedly, and the nights are longer – but in my experience all that means is the nights are darker; the bumps in the night are louder; and the terror of the unknown blackness down the hallway is infinitely more acute.

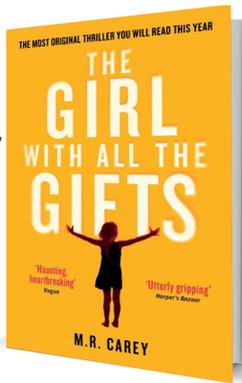
It took four sleepless nights to conquer *The Girl With All The Gifts* by M R Carey. Four nights where the lights had to stay on, and I feared that every creak of a floorboard, or groaning of my flats Victorian walls, was going to be the last sound I'd ever hear.

Then it was over. The cold sweats began to evaporate and the realisation that it was...just a book...fell over me.

I'm not normally a fan of horror, but I'd been reassured that Carey was clever – not just a writer who goes for the screams, but one who drags the screams from within you. He was more Stephen King than R.L. Stine.

The narrative follows a little girl called Melanie, her teacher, two soldiers, and a scientist, as they try to escape cross-country to safety after their scientific research outpost was overtaken by men who are taking advantage of what is left of the post-apocalyptic world with aggression and no mercy.

I've sometimes read horror books where they've felt cheap, almost exploitative of the world that's been created for the drama to take place, but *The Girl With All The Gifts* is different. This book is an active examination of how people would behave in a post-apocalyptic world, rather than an observation of horrific events.



The Book Thief by Markus Zusak is narrated by Death. I suspect it's pretty much the first thing anyone will tell you about the novel.

It's a well-crafted story about a young girl who lives with foster carers in Munich during the Second World War, but it could have so easily done without Death narrating it. I'm not adverse to something a bit out of the box, I suppose I just feel that this particular linguistic device was a marketing tool rather than something key to moving the novel forward.

The story flowed well, with Zusak showing great skill in the character development of Liesel, but my enjoyment was slightly stunted by the appearance of Death being all whimsical about what he had seen elsewhere on his other worldly travels.

People say 'kill your darlings' and I think Death was Zusak's darling.

It must also be enormously difficult to write about events retrospectively and fictionally. However, the use of phrases such as the 'final solution' when Liesel first meets her carers gives away the authors knowledge of historical context, which at this point is still in the future. It dilutes the way Zusak otherwise very much takes you back to 1930/40's Munich.

Overall I believe the book is worth of all its plaudits and I would recommend it, because much like the Harry Potter series, it wonderful story telling even if it's not brilliantly written. I much more enjoyed a personal look into the lives of a people so often over looked by history, the civilians of Germany who weren't supporters of Nazism.

