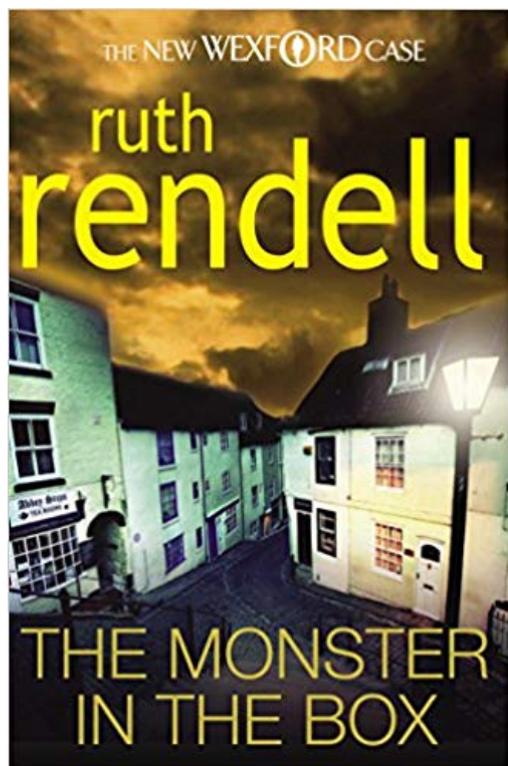


The Monster in the Box: (A Wexford Case) *by* Ruth Rendell (author)



Monster in the Box

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Reviews of the **The Monster in the Box: (A Wexford Case)** *by* Ruth Rendell (author)

Moronydit

When you read this book you realize that Ms. Rendell is coming to the end of her wonderful Inspector Wexford series. I for one am sad to see this, but look forward to reading her next book "The Vault" which is recently out. In this book the enigmatic Wexford is being haunted by a ghost from his past. A ghost that he first met when he was just a young copper and newly on the force. A ghost who Wexford is convinced is a serial killer, but one that was never brought to justice. And then lo and behold the ghost comes back into Wexford's life after many years absence and Wexford and Burden are dealing with a present-day murder. Again Wexford has no evidence or proof other than his own assurance that this man is a serial killer and is still in the business, so to speak. I enjoyed the book. The first part of the book was especially strong, but the ending is a bit disappointing even though we know that things don't always work out the way they should in real life. I love Wexford

and have enjoyed reading him over the past many years. He's a copper's copper and one who has good instincts and an intelligence that have all helped him be very successful in his long and illustrious career. Fortunately for me, I have still got quite a few non-series books written by the remarkable Ms. Rendell, and I'm going to enjoy getting through this list. She is a remarkable writer.

Fenius

For Ruth Rendell, it's another episode in her Inspector Wexford series, a popular British police procedural of the first water. "The Monster in the Box" is Rendell's 22nd Wexford novel and she's still going strong.

This one, however, takes a different tact, a drastic turn, in her approach to one of most cerebral series of the genre. Here, with her always sensitive and sensible direction, Rendell's narrative takes us back in time, to the time when Wexford is just beginning his career as a police detective. First, this flashback technique provides us with some interesting biographical material of Wexford--what he was like back then, his personal life, his desire to become a great policeman, one of intellect and wisdom. As a young policeman, he spent much of his time studying "Sometimes he went out to the pub in the evenings...but mostly he stayed in and read. Public libraries were in their heyday then...(with) lots and lots of good books. He read them, poetry, and plays and novels. Worlds opened for him, and far from distracting him from his duties, they seemed to make him a better policeman."

This first case, however, has resided with him for all these years. Outside the house where Wexford was investigating his first murder case (a woman found strangled in her bedroom), he notices "a short, muscular man wearing a scarf and walking a dog. He gave Wexford an unnerving stare." And with nothing but "a feeling," Wexford is convinced this man, Eric Targo, is the murderer. Alas, nothing is proved and the case basically remains unsolved. Still, many years later, Wexford continues to sense Targo's presence (literally and figuratively). Targo moves on and now years later, he's back in Kingsmarkham and Wexford's sensibilities (and his belief) are rekindled. And murders begin to happen. Along with his doubting able assistant Mike Burden, Wexford "plods" along, waiting and hoping for just the right clue to drop.

In addition to the main element of the novel, Rendell's penchant for subplots continues. Social significance has long been a trait of Rendell's works and her last few books have dealt strongly with women's issues, racial issues, and cultural issues. (Dame Rendell is a member of the House of Lords and holds strong personal views here.)

In "Monster," one of Wexford's assistants, a very socially correct officer, fears that a local Pakistani girl is about to be forced into an arranged marriage. "Wexford's experience had taught him what deep waters one struggles to swim in when plunging into the traditions of another culture." Wexford has his hands full, but even an escaped lion, which "terrorized" the neighborhood for a while, doesn't deter him from his primary objective: to prove that Targo is the murderer.

Whether or not there are upcoming Wexfords remains to be seen, but the 22 books have all been well worth the time spent. From "From Doon with Death," the first Wexford installment, readers have not been disappointed. In addition, Rendell writes under the name of Barbara Vine, departing from the police procedural to enter into the more psychological thriller genre, also worth the time.

Vertokini

Not QUITE the last of Inspector Wexford (huzzah!) even though the end is drawing inexorably closer (pshaw, pshaw). This next-to-latest in the series has its roots in the early days of Wexford's career, when he became convinced that one Eric Targo was a murderer. For years, his life and Targo's have intersected, in large part -- Wexford believes -- because Targo is taunting him. Eventually, the novel moves from the past to the present; Targo reappears, and Wexford is able, at long last, to build a

real case against him.

Along the way, we are given a delightful excursion into Wexford's personal past, revealing how he met and married Dora. And we are treated to the usual odd mix of characters, presented with Rendell's usual subtlety. We also have the usual socially-relevant subplot, again involving Asians and the hyper-politically-correct DC Goldsmith. I found the ending a little disappointing (after all that buildup, I hoped for more of a ahocker) but all in all this is another great read.

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