



*Magazine*

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*A magazine about ~~Harry Potter~~ & J.K. Rowling*

*CORMORAN STRIKE*

# STRIKE SIX

**SPECIAL EDITION THE INK BLACK HEART**

*+ The Ink Black Prince & The virtual realm & More*



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# WELCOME

When *The Crimes of Grindelwald* was released back in 2018, we dedicated an entire issue of *The Rowling Library Magazine* to the movie. We did the same back in April with *The Secrets of Dumbledore*. And since *The Ink Black Heart* was eagerly awaited by Robert Galbraith fan, we said “why not”?

So this September issue is 100% dedicated to the new book in the Cormoran Strike series: *The Ink Black Heart*. In the following pages you'll find reviews, analysis, and even theories of what's to come.

In addition, we've asked Fausto Giurescu to illustrate a Famous Detective Card, in keeping with the theme of the whole magazine.

Thank you and see you in November!

Patricio

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35. FAMOUS DETECTIVE CARD 37. THE MODERN AGE.**



# SECRET HISTORY OF THE WIZARDING PHENOMENON

Based on original research and exclusive interviews, this book tells the story of how the Harry Potter books, movies, theme parks, fandom and more were created. Including the creative processes, the marketing aspect, and the legal issues that arose, this publication aims to be a behind-the-scenes of the Harry Potter phenomenon.



Read an excerpt



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This is an unofficial book and it has not been authorized by J.K. Rowling or Warner Bros.





BY ANNIE A.

# J.K. ROWLING AND THE VIRTUAL REALM

I was 16 when I first created my Twitter account, almost 15 years ago. During those times, the social network was a safe space for me, a virtual territory where I could log in and complain about my life to a group of strangers who shared my interests and my pessimistic view of the world.

Not long after I activated my account, I met on Twitter the man who I would marry a decade after. In parallel, during those times, I would also spend a great deal of time writing in my *Livejournal* page and reading posts from my virtual friends about the different fandoms we were into. For me, a typical millennial, virtuality and real world were always interconnected. A big and important part of my life

developed online, and I got tons of positive elements from it (my marriage, first and foremost).

## NEW WAYS OF TELLING STORIES

For that reason, I found the virtual exchanges in *The Ink Black Heart* deeply engaging. They were fun to read. The tweets represented in the book seemed very familiar to me, though I never experienced that level of harassment myself (Rowling certainly did). The exchanges between the fans inside Drek's Game also felt extremely realistic (I have been member of several fandoms, and I had very similar conversations with other fans and random people online).

Having said that, the representation

of virtual exchanges between characters (such as tweets or messages) poses a great challenge from an artistic point of view. They interrupt the rhythm of the prose, they are direct, short, and have no artistic value. However, if we want to write a realistic story in the modern world, the mechanism of introducing virtual messages in the narration should increase in literary works in the future. J.K. Rowling really made those digital exchanges an essential part of *The Ink Black Heart*. They are, in my opinion, the core of the story, and I think it was a brave decision of the author.

### THE CHALLENGE OF A TV ADAPTATION

Thinking about these new ways of telling stories, I realized that this book will have, eventually, a

TV adaptation (the BBC *Strike* series is now in its fourth season). Honestly, I am totally curious about how they are going to adapt this book on screen. As I said, the virtual exchanges are a core part of the novel, but they do not seem to have a particular cinematographic value. Let's imagine Strike and Robin reading out loud some of the tweets. That could work, but we would get a very narrow idea of the nature of those messages (they certainly won't be able to read out loud the number of tweets that the reader actually reads in the book; it just does not work on TV).

However, the greater challenge for me here is Drek's Game; particularly, those exchanges that happen between the moderators without the presence of Robin or Strike. They give the reader plenty of clues about the personalities of



STRIKE (BBC ONE)



STRIKE (BBC ONE)

the different moderators and show the dynamics of their relationships (I am thinking about the exchanges between Paperwhite and Morehouse, for example). The creators of the TV series could animate the game and show the viewer the same content that the reader gets to see in the book, but I do not see that option plausible, as it does not match the atmosphere of the series and would take a lot of time.

They could also show the moderators directly writing those messages. However, it would give out who is who in most of cases (they could hide their faces, I

guess?). In any case, this solution does not seem practical from a cinematographic point of view either.

My take on this is that the TV adaption will show around 5% of the virtual exchanges in the book. The other 95% will be cut out. We will get to see what Robin and Strike see, and we will miss the spirit of the novel. In any case, the book is quite long, so I would really appreciate if the story were streamlined. Unfortunately, I believe that my favorite parts – the exchanges that happen in the “virtual world” – won’t make the final cut of the series.



BY RAPHAEL TAFURI

# DAWN COMES AFTER DARKNESS

## Processing *The Ink Black Heart* and seeing its strongest aspects

As I digested my own frustrations with *The Ink Black Heart*, I turned to look at people's thoughts about it and I cannot honestly remember the last time I saw such a clear division of opinions regarding a piece of writing. Both sides, those who love the book and those who are still going through their disappointment, have strong, valid, book-bound reasons to do so. In this article, I will attempt to bring balance to the force. Hey, if Strike can do it, so can I.

In order to achieve my goal, to bring a minimum level of satisfaction to those who eagerly need it, myself included, let's look first at the points made by those who loved *The Ink Black Heart* and they mostly seem to circle

around a similar premise, the one that J.K. Rowling excels once again at writing intricate characters proving how well she understands human nature and its shifting behavior.

That assumption is at the very least undeniable and at most times nearly explicit. The highly endearing passages in the sixth book are the ones where the relationships between characters come to the foreground, be them new or returning faces. Seeing the plot is set in 2015, part of me expects Flavia Upcott to start, in our present day or in the near future, as a good intern at Cormoran and Robin's agency, much with how insightful the now young woman is and also how grateful she might be to Robin

for having saved her life. And that is a bit of headcanon I have zero problem carrying with me.

I see a lot of sympathy towards Katya Upcott, but here Rowling's talent for multi-layered characters shines one more time. While so many readers feel sorry for the woman trapped between Inigo and Gus, it is worth noting, and the text itself does it for you, that Katya spent so much time dealing with her abusive husband and also looking out for Josh as a way to alienate her pain that she never saw what her own son, in her own house, had become.

Perhaps the one character I indeed feel sorry for is Vikas Bhardwaj, a.k.a. Morehouse, because he is the only one of them all who didn't find himself in his predicament because of his own choices. Being incredibly bright and being

disabled should never, by far, be reasons why people end up alone, yet it's sad to know that's not how life and social circles work. Then to see the person who was likely one of the first people who ever offered him understanding and friendship be the very same person who murders him mercilessly was probably the most heart-wrenching moment in the entire story.

I now invite you to take a look back at 2012, when J.K. Rowling published *The Casual Vacancy*, her first novel for adults and her first book to divide her faithful readership as we take a look at Gus Upcott, a.k.a. Anomie and a bunch of other people he pretended to be at the same time.

A large number of people have shared their disenchantment with Anomie's lack of motivation to



THE INK BLACK HEART, COVER ARTWORK (LITTLE, BROWN AND CO.)

kill Edie Ledwell and that at first seemed a reasonable concern when reading a crime novel. After all, it is widely (and wrongly) believed that if there's no motive, then there's no crime. This expectation of motive, if we wish to look at it through optimistic lenses, comes from our human nature to believe all people are good until something happens to turn them bad. A lot of readers wanted, in a search for some redeeming quality for our villain, to find that one moment, that one thing that turned the switch and made him a murderer. It could have been the rejection towards the game, or selling the movie rights, or merely having different opinions from his own. Bottom line, there isn't one. And that is a good thing.

Life doesn't need a motive; life simply happens and goes on. Anomie didn't have a switching moment; his sense of entitlement grew into bitterness which then grew into violence, just like it happens in real life. Several people thought that being an incel (involuntary celibate) wasn't enough of an answer for all the things Gus did. Allow me to disabuse you of this notion, because, alas, it is.

In my culture, there is an old joke that goes something like this: a person says they're single by choice and you reply with "yes, *their choice*," which implies that the person is single not because

they want to, but because there is something in them driving people away, be it their looks, their personalities or the fact they talk while chewing. Cruel, maybe, but it can help cast us a light at the matter at hand.

A common trait in incels, and a clear one in the specific case of Gus Upcott, is believing that, just because they're men, women are expected and indebted to have sex with them. Their beliefs get way worse than that, because they tend to deal horribly with any kind of rejection. Take a look at Gus: when Darcy was friendly with him, he created this delusional narrative that she was his girlfriend and even told his family about her; then, when he got a reality check (and a rather kind one, might I add), he turned against her, hacked her network, turned an entire forum against her, and stole private pictures of another woman and used those when convenient to him. The worst, or saddest, or most pitiful part of these actions is that it is a considerably recurring one. Traits such as female subjugation, entitlement, raw and disgusting misogyny run amok in these men's minds and Gus Upcott is an example of how far it can go and how much damage it can cause if not spotted and dealt with by our good old friend, therapy.

Gus's conduct gets worse as he grows older and life happens to him, and a reread of the book,

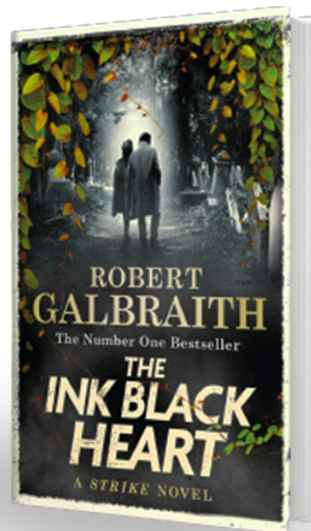
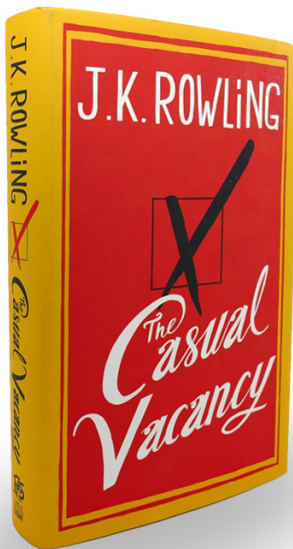


knowing who the people in the in-game chats are, does help us see it more clearly. Gus's biggest love letter to someone he admired, Drek's Game, is turned down by the object of his affection, which promptly leads him into a dark path of lies, defamation, and murder.

You can ask, "But why isn't this stuff more explicit in the book?" and the answer is a simple one: just as in real life, you don't praise this kind of practice by giving it plenty of space. It's basically the same reason why, for instance, you don't see terrible things like suicide on the news: too much word-of-mouth leads to copycats.

The idea that Rowling thought about this and kept his reasons greatly at bay when writing "The Ink Black Heart" is our beacon of light to dust away the clouds from our expectations and start to see where this book truly shines.

Again and again, the characters of *The Ink Black Heart*, both in the book and the cartoon inside (another testament to Rowling's prowess as a creator), are layered beings with individual personalities and quirks, who react to life in their own way. This latest addition to the Strike series is, more than all the other volumes before, parallel to 2012's *The Casual*



*Vacancy*: a section of their (not-so, for *The Ink Black Heart*) ordinary lives shown in black ink on white paper. Which specific section, you ask? The one where it crosses the lives of Cormoran Strike and Robin Ellacott. And that is why, once their paths drift, we know nothing else about the ones who survived.

It's fun to see how a thousand-page-long book, with enough space to tell us what it wants to, manages to tell so much more through subtlety and silence. Another part of the book that had first readers scratching their heads for a long time was the absence of Strike's skills. He not once visited the crime scene nor he ever directly interviewed Gus Upcott. True, he didn't. But that wasn't Strike's investigation, was it?

Remember who Edie Ledwell went looking for when she visited the agency and apply this logic to the entire course of the plot. This is Robin's case, not Strike's. And here is the one thing, the very one, the biggest proof of strength that Rowling could give us for the Strike/Robin relationship, far better and more meaningful than a kiss: we know well enough what the agency means to Cormoran and he still respected and trusted Robin enough to allow her to lead the case. Strike followed Robin everywhere, not the other way around. Uncountable fans spotted this in the cover real earlier this

year: Robin was stepping ahead of Strike, for the first time. Even the graphic art for the book is telling you this, so we should all well remember.

I am not, by any means, claiming that there weren't mistakes made during the unfolding of the case, but what if they are intentional? This is Robin's first investigation as a lead, with a chance of it happening way too earlier than Strike had anticipated. But he respected Edie's choice and Robin's abilities. Robin did visit the scene of the crime, or at least she tried to. She took the lead from the moment they were hired until she ran to save Flavia's life. Yes, she needs honing, but which professional during their first independent task doesn't?

Practice makes it perfect. We all heard that at some point in our lives. The only way for Robin to become a great detective (with all indicators pointing at being even better than Strike) is by getting started and moving forwards. Robin knows the mistakes she made during her first case and Rowling knows them well enough as well. Time, life, and book seven, will show us how these mistakes will help shape the real Robin Ellacott, private detective. And this is, yet again, one more time, the brilliance of the portrayal of human nature in *The Ink Black Heart*.



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BY BEATRICE GROVES

# THE INK BLACK PRINCE

## Connections between *The Ink Black Heart* and *Harry Potter*

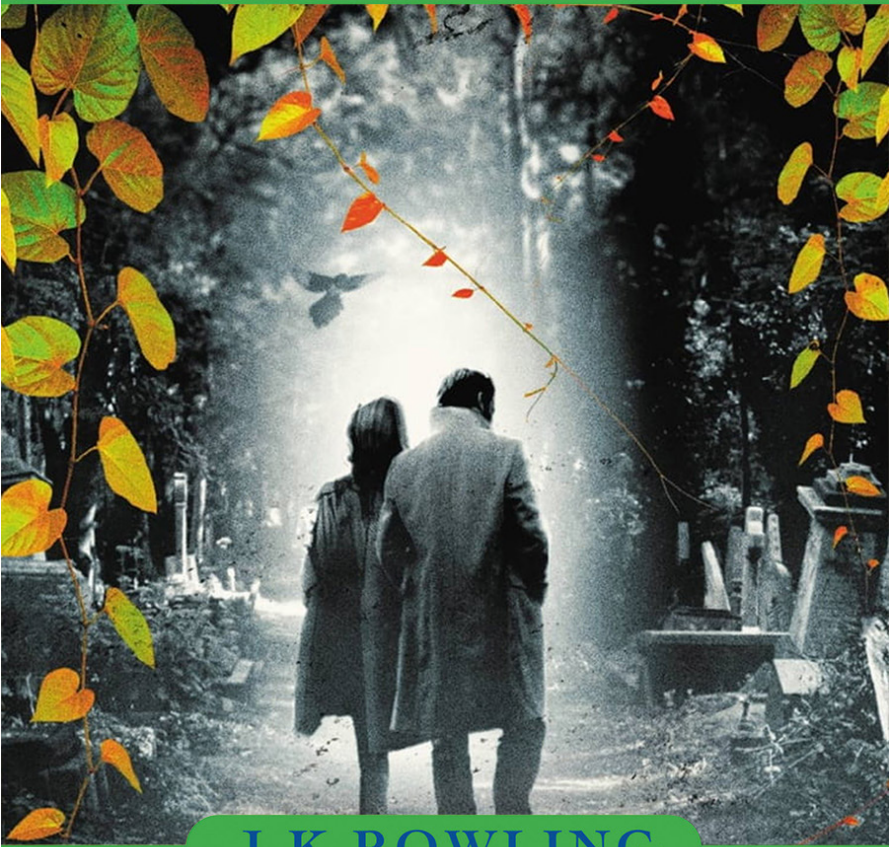
From the beginning J.K. Rowling has encouraged readers to find parallels between *Strike* and *Harry Potter*. There was the initial announcement of a new seven book series (since quashed – I’m delighted to find that she’s now planned out ten<sup>1</sup> and hopefully we’ll get even more). There was also the arch description of her inspiration for *Strike* – ‘*Strike was a very vivid character who came to me, in the best way, he just walked into my head*’<sup>2</sup> – a conscious echo of the way in which Rowling has spoken for over two decades of Harry as ‘*the hero who had walked into my head*’.<sup>3</sup> I’ve written up some of the previous connections between the two series here<sup>4</sup> and here<sup>5</sup> and this piece will look at the extent to

which *Ink Black Heart* continues these connections.

A small, but pleasing, link is that our heroes are about to become godparents. Overt Christianity plays a small but important role in both series – and the significance of godparents in *Harry Potter* (like the importance of Christmas) is a subtle marker of the cultural Christianity of the Wizarding World. Being a godparent in *Harry Potter*, however, is a somewhat lonely role – it seems that each child only has one, and each godparented child is swiftly orphaned, leaving that godparent in the sole parental role. When, however, it is revealed in *The Ink Black Heart* that Strike and Robin are about to

# HARRY POTTER

*and the Ink Black Prince*



J.K. ROWLING

BLOOMSBURY

be asked to be joint godparents of Ilsa's unborn child, it as a sign of the way that the lonely heroism of being the Chosen One (for all that Harry is ably supported by Hermione and Ron) has shifted to a heroic partnership. Strike and Robin are from this point forward not only partners, but declared as such, engraved in the agency door's glass. Their shared godparenthood is another connection formed along the road before they become partners in another sense.

Another of my favourite Harry Potter connections in this novel is that those of us who paid attention to Hermione's Study of Ancient Runes will steal a march on Strike who is 'no expert on the Futhark.' The first rune of the story turns up in a conversation between LordDrek and Vilepechora – when the former says *'I've just been talking to Eihwaz.'* I knew immediately that this was a rune, because it turns up in Hermione's O.W.L. exam in *Order of the Phoenix*:

*'How were the Runes?'* said Ron, yawning and stretching.  
*'I mis-translated ehwaz,'* said Hermione furiously. *'It means partnership, not defence; I mixed it up with eihwaz.'*  
*'Ah well,'* said Ron lazily, *'that's only one mistake, isn't it, you'll still get –*  
*'Oh, shut up!'* said Hermione angrily.

'Ehwaz' literally means 'horse' and its esoteric meanings include teamwork, trust and love. Its shape can be understood as two horses' heads touching and it has been linked to the mythical horse-riding twins so common in European folklore – from the Greek Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux) to Hengist and Horsa<sup>6</sup>. The Ehwaz rune, therefore, represents both the helpmeet steed and the divine twins so Hermione's rendering as 'partnership' is fair enough. 'Eihwaz', meanwhile, literally means 'yew' and its esoteric meanings are linked with the yew's fatal symbolism – associations which, of course, are the reason that Voldemort's wand was made of yew. Eihwaz's esoteric meanings include death, endurance, transformation and protection. Once again Hermione's 'defence' seems a fair translation. It would, indeed, be satisfying if someone were to repeat Hermione's mistake and confuse the rune name 'Eihwaz' (death) with the more touchy-feely 'Ehwaz' (love).

Those readers who remembered Hermione's exam and recognised 'Eihwaz' as a rune, had a strong clue about what kind of organization LordDrek and Vilepechora are part of – and soon after we meet Ultima Thule's enforcer Thurisaz (with this rune he tattooed on his Adam's apple) which makes the link clear. There is another rune clue for those paying attention – as Vilepechora's rune name 'Algiz' is



hidden in plain sight in his Twitter handle 'Al Gizzard.'

All three types of aliases, of course - runic, inkhearted and on twitter - underline the way in it is possible to present yourself as someone entirely 'other' on-line. This idea is central to the novel's central concern with disconnection - one of the morals of the story is that if connectedness only takes place between fictitious avatars then no true bulwarks against anomie can be formed. But the aliases also form vital clues and create one of the most thoroughgoing *Harry Potter* connections - for these on-line personas (especially if supported by stolen photos, as with Paperwhite) enable a real-world version of a Polyjuice-transformation. And, as in *Harry Potter*, false identities are used both by the bad guys to evade capture and the good guys trying to elicit information. Robin taking on someone else's online persona in order to inveigle her way into the mods chatroom felt very Harry and Ron Polyjuicing their way into the Slytherin Common Room. (And indeed the parallel is particularly pointed given that we know that when Rowling herself strolled into MuggleNet's chat room she was 'concerned to find that many of the moderators feel their spiritual home is Slytherin').

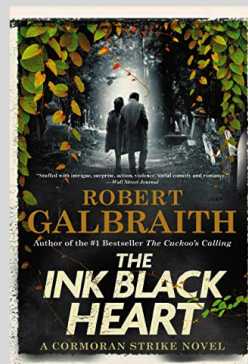
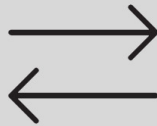
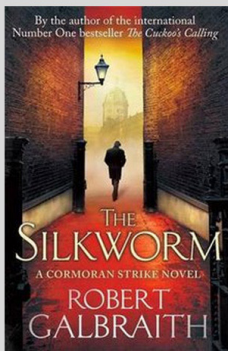
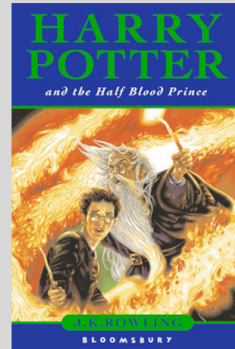
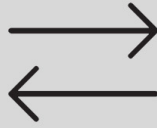
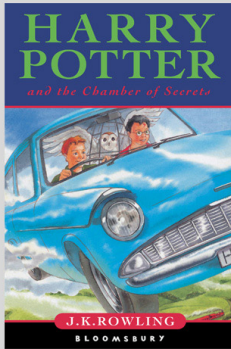
In *Harry Potter*, Polyjuice Potion is first taken in book 2, pivoting round the murderer using it

book 4 to lure our hero to his destruction, which (given the chiasitic structure) provides the clue that someone will be using Polyjuice to hide their identity in book 6. In *Strike*, likewise, secret on-line identities first appear in book 2, pivoting round the use of electronic text by the murderer to lure our hero to her destruction in book 4, which (given the chiasitic structure) provides the clue that the murderer will be using an on-line alias to hide his identity in book 6 (a clue not simply to the importance of Anomie, but to his on-line alias as Paperwhite).

This creates a four-way link between *Chamber of Secrets*/*Half-Blood Prince* and *Silkworm/Ink Black Heart* but the main one of these is, of course, the text-within-the-text. It is notable in this regard that what Rowling has said interview about Riddle's Diary finds its strongest parallel in the text-within-the-texts of *Ink Black Heart*. She has discussed the diary twice in interview:

*My sister used to commit her innermost thoughts to her diary. Her great fear was that someone would read it. That's how the idea came to me of a diary that is itself against you. You would be confiding everything to pages that aren't inanimate.*<sup>8</sup>

*Now, the diary to me is a very scary object, a really, really frightening object. This*



manipulative little book, the temptation particularly for a young girl to pour out her heart to a diary, which is never something I was prone to, but my sister was. The power of something that answers you back, and at the time that I wrote that I'd never been in an Internet chat room. But I've since thought "Well it's very similar." Just typing your deepest thoughts into the ether and getting answers back, and you don't know

who is answering you.<sup>9</sup>

This idea – and this fear – clearly stayed with Rowling and she succeeds brilliantly in capturing that frisson again for an adult audience. It is a deeply unnerving moment in the chatroom conversations when we realise that Morehouse is confiding in a false, Tom Riddle-like persona, who will murder him.

Both the Polyjuice/on-line avatar and the text-within-the-text ideas are examples where the specific connections we were expecting between *Ink Black Heart* and *Half-Blood Prince* holds up well<sup>10</sup>, *Ink Black Heart*, indeed, opens with an opal necklace which felt like a knowing wink to *Half-Blood Prince* and while there was one big miss in the expected parallels (no important death) it has worked well in other instances (see the discussion at Hogwarts Professor for more<sup>11</sup>). The text-within-the-text parallel, indeed, came true beyond our expectations – not simply ‘*The Ink Black Heart*’ but also Drek’s Game and the transcripts of the moderator chat within that game. It was Snape’s annotations on his Potions’ Textbook squared. As Amelia has pointed out<sup>12</sup> there is also neat connection between Anomie’s game and Snape’s marginalia, in that in both cases the in-text ‘author’ improves the original text. (And, of course, in both cases the author of this creative and satisfying marginal text will turn out to be a murderer).

Likewise, the situation between Robin and Strike – in love but not together – had strong parallels with the central love-story of *Half-Blood Prince*. The scene between Ilsa and Robin, in particular, had strong overtones of the conversations between Ginny and Hermione on the same theme:

*‘Hermione told me to get on with*

*life, maybe go out with some other people, relax a bit around you, because I never used to be able to talk if you were in the room, remember? And she thought you might take a bit more notice if I was a bit more – myself.’*

*‘Smart girl, that Hermione,’ said Harry, trying to smile.*

— Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

Ilsa, likewise, advises her friend that a bit of redressing the relationship power imbalance and the odd pang of jealousy might help things along:

*‘How are you going to get past the “I’ve only ever been with one man” thing unless you actually date some other people? It’s only a drink. You aren’t risking much with a drink. You never know what might come of it.’*

*Robin looked at her friend, eyes narrowed.*

*‘And I’m sure making Strike jealous is the last thing on your mind.’*

*‘Well,’ said Ilsa with a wink, ‘I wouldn’t say it’s the last.’*

My favourite *Half-Blood Prince/Ink Black Heart* parallel, however, was one that we should have predicted, for (just as with the Goblet of Fire/Lethal White parallels) it would have helped in identifying the murderer – but I don’t think anyone did.

Reading *Ink Black Heart* it seemed clear that the murderer

would be young and male and a violent misogynist: in short, we were looking for an incel. A man whose sexual frustration finds an outlet in abusing women online, building up to such a pitch of hatred that it spills into real-life femicide. Gus Upcott was one of the few suspects who might fit this profile; and he was also instantly suspected by Strike. So, of course, I as immediately discounted him – falling again for the trick Rowling played in *Half-Blood Prince*.

As John Granger has argued, after

*We begin the sixth story as careful readers who had been duped by and large five times. We'd all taken oaths, publicly and privately, not to be fooled a sixth time. Everyone else in the book was on our side. 'Sure, Harry,' pat on head, shared glance with Dumbledore and Hermione, 'we know. Draco's the youngest Death Eater ever and you know best about Snape – like all the other times you've been right about Snape.'* (John Granger, Harry Potter's Bookshelf, 32)

Book 6 in both series is the first

## But the lack of a twist was the twist – and it made a perfect link between *Ink Black Heart* and *Half-Blood Prince*

getting suckered in by Harry's point of view in each Harry Potter novel and believing that Snape or Malfoy are up to nefarious deeds when they aren't, by book 6 the reader has learnt their lesson. They may have thought Snape was the bad guy in book 1, that Malfoy was up to no good in book 2, that Sirius Black was the murderer in book 3 etc – but by now they've learnt caution:

time that all the signs are pointing the right way, but by now we're firmly refusing to read them the right way up. In *Ink Black Heart* we're told right from the start that the murderer is Anomie (just as Draco's mission to kill Dumbledore is made abundantly clear at the beginning of *Half-Blood Prince*) and Anomie is precisely the lonely young man we'd naturally assume he would be (just as Snape is – according to the denouement of

this novel at least – finally the bad guy he'd always appeared to be).

The signs were all pointing to the Upcotts as the source of Anomie's knowledge (and the parallel with *Silkworm* made me suspicious that the solution would lie with the agent). The taser meant that anyone could be the killer (they needn't have been confident of being able to physically overpower Josh) – which meant I was busy suspecting all the other Upcotts – Inigo, Katya and Flavia – and dismissing the obvious Upcott candidate precisely because he fitted the profile of the killer to well. (*Troubled Blood*, indeed, had lured me into a strong sense that we weren't looking for a young, virginal male killer whatever the ambience of the book might suggest). But the lack of a twist was the twist – and it made a perfect link between *Ink Black Heart* and *Half-Blood Prince*, but one which I don't think anyone thought to look for. For all the accuracy of (some) of our predictions, Rowling has tripped us up once again.

[org/2020/11/06/harry-potter-and-the-mysteries-of-cormoran-strike-part-2-cratylic-names/](http://www.therowlinglibrary.com/2020/11/06/harry-potter-and-the-mysteries-of-cormoran-strike-part-2-cratylic-names/)

[6]: <https://www.mugglenet.com/2018/09/lethal-white-horses/>

[7]: [https://therowlinglibrary.com/jkrowling.com/textonly/en/news\\_view\\_id=63.html](https://therowlinglibrary.com/jkrowling.com/textonly/en/news_view_id=63.html)

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[9]: <https://www.hp-lexicon.org/source/interviews/cssk/>

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[11]: <https://www.hogwartsprofessor.com/ink-black-heart-parallel-series-idea-share-your-half-blood-prince-parallels/>

[12]: <https://www.hogwartsprofessor.com/ink-black-heart-parallel-series-idea-share-your-half-blood-prince-parallels/comment-page-1/#comment-1623816>

## Footnotes:

[1]: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdKPOwCR\\_sg&ab\\_channel=TheRowlingLibrary](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdKPOwCR_sg&ab_channel=TheRowlingLibrary)

[2]: <http://robert-galbraith.com/about/>

[3]: <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0010/20/1kl.00.html>

[4]: <http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org/2020/11/05/harry-potter-the-mysteries-of-cormoran-strike-part1>

[5]: <http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org/2020/11/06/harry-potter-and-the-mysteries-of-cormoran-strike-part-2-cratylic-names/>



# September, from the Twitter archive



**J.K. Rowling** ✓  
@jk\_rowling



Robert Glenister does an incredible job on  
[@RGalbraith](#)'s audiobooks! Thrilled to see he's got the  
[@CrimeFest](#) award.

10:46 AM · 25 Sep, 2015

39 replies 214 shares 1.1K likes





## A Look Inside Season 3 of *The Strike & Ellacott Files*

The *Ink Black Heart* has been out for less than a month and the three of us at ***The Strike & Ellacott Files*** are already on our second and third reads as we prepare to dive back into our regularly scheduled episodes of the podcast. J.K. Rowling's latest has proven to be just as dark, complex, and fascinating as we'd hoped, and we cannot wait to explore all the clues, themes and characterization it has to offer. And with over 1,000 pages, there will be plenty to discuss! Here is a brief overview of some of the things you can look forward to hearing on our upcoming season where we will do a deep dive into *The Ink Black Heart*.

## EPIGRAPHS

If you've listened to our podcast before, you'll know that we love analyzing the epigraphs in the Strike novels, which add layers of meaning and provide a deeper insight and clues into their plots, characters, and relationships.

The epigraph to the Prologue reads:

*"Wounds of the heart are often  
fatal,  
but not necessarily so."*

Henry Gray FRS  
Gray's Anatomy

While this gives us insight into the wounds of the heart experienced in the prologue, it foreshadows the ending of the novel, a Coda in which Strike suffers a wound to the heart that finally allows him to open his eyes to the nature of his feelings for Robin. That such wounds are not necessarily fatal comes as a welcome reassurance to the reader invested in the romance between Strike and Robin; we can predict that in the seventh book Strike's non-fatal wound will heal, and that the relationship between the partners will continue to grow.

Another predictive—and highly accurate—epigraph comes from the second time we meet Strike's new girlfriend Madeline Courson-Miles, a.k.a. Knock-off Robin, a.k.a. Charlotte 2.0, in chapter 8.

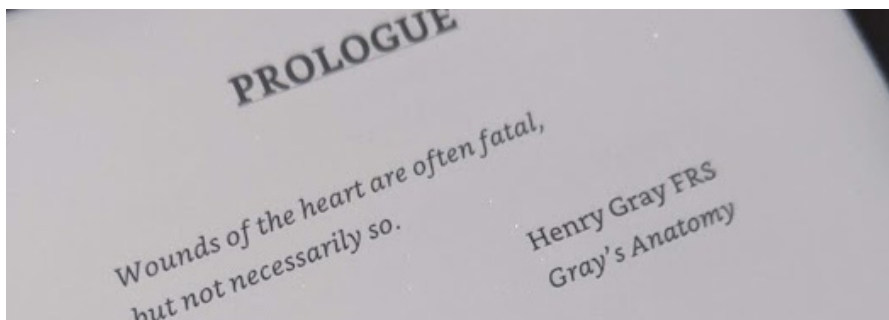
*"She was a careless, fearless girl...  
Kindhearted in the main,  
But somewhat heedless with her  
tongue,  
And apt at causing pain."*

Christina Rossetti

Jessie Cameron

Were it not already obvious that Madeline makes a terrible match for Strike, seeing this epigraph that she is 'apt at causing pain' reveals that this relationship will result in suffering; of course, I'm not sure that any of us could have reasonably expected this pain to appear so quite literally, in the form of a high heel to the leg.

There is also much to be gained from looking at the collection of epigraphs as a whole, a body of work that resonates with the themes of the novel. Rowling draws her epigraphs in *The Ink Black Heart* from the writing of more than 20 women poets, hailing from both Britain and America and spanning the 19th century. The epigraphs come from different artistic movements, concern different subjects, and are written in different styles; that they are written by women, many of whom used pseudonyms to publish their work, is one of the only commonalities between them. The 19th century was of course a period of immense social change, wrought in part by Industrialization; the lives of the later writers among Rowling's epigraphs would have been nearly



#### EPIGRAPHS IN THE INK BLACK HEART

unrecognizable to the earliest of them. It was in response to these changes that Burkheim coined the term *anomie* at the close of the century, and the possibility that Rowling is drawing parallels between this period and the contemporary changes in society caused by the explosion of social media is an intriguing one. We're looking forward to exploring this further, hopefully aided by the help of Dr. Beatrice Groves for a special episode deep dive into the women's writing which frames *The Ink Black Heart*.

### FANDOM

Rowling's experience with fandom as the creator of one of the world's most massive and beloved franchise must be both extensive and entirely unique; it is only with extensive knowledge about the particulars of fandom that an author could write such an authentic account, in which reading about InkHearts strikes a chord in anyone who considers

themselves a part of a fandom. We can all recognize ourselves in this world of usernames, conventions, and occasional drama (although hopefully our recognition stops short of murder). The incredible accuracy in this depiction has us wondering if Rowling immersed herself in fandom culture for research, or if the years of experience with fandom from the other side has given her a rare understanding of its inner workings.

Rowling has recently said that the fandom within this book is not modeled on the Potter fandom. Instead, the InkHearts are inspired by what two of her children told her was a very toxic cartoon fandom (Pools and Kenz would place bets that it was Rick and Morty!). Nevertheless, we look forward to finding all of those elements which resonate with our own experiences in fandom.

### DISCONNECTION

J.K. Rowling said in a recent

interview that one of the biggest themes of *The Ink Black Heart* is disconnection. We see this in the character of Anomie, a term which means the lack of normal societal or ethical standards; someone who feels like they don't fit in with society. Anomie adopts this name as a way to highlight their disconnect from society as they immerse themselves in an online world. Anomie also uses their power to enforce disconnection between others in Drek's Game via Rule 14, a forced anonymity that ensures players cannot forge personal connections with each other. The search for Anomie throughout the novel is embedded in the larger landscape of a disconnected social media, where Robin and Strike must work to reconnect anonymous profiles with real identities in order to solve their case.

The theme of disconnection extends to the personal relationships of the main characters as well. Strike and his half-sister Prudence, for example, keep attempting to meet and for a multitude of reasons can't seem to connect.

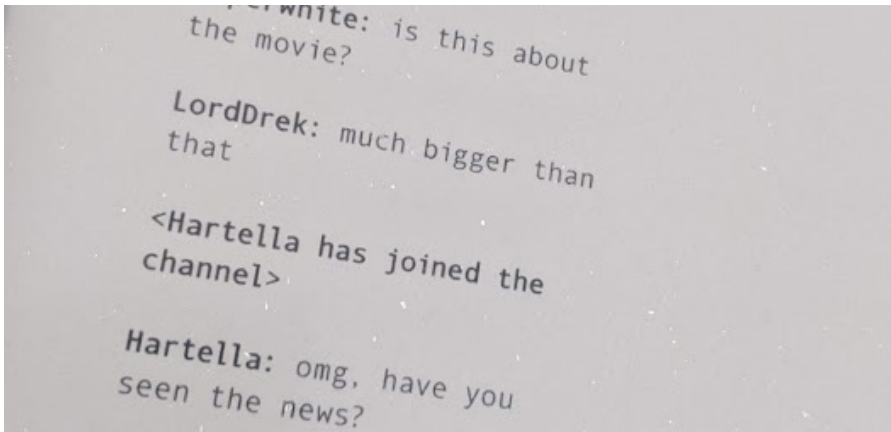
Most significantly, though, we see Strike and Robin having an intense disconnect over their feelings for each other. They can never seem to get on the same page, always assuming the other thinks the complete opposite of what they're actually thinking.

However, all hope is not lost; even though there is a real disconnect romantically, Strike and Robin do find ways to connect and deepen their friendship throughout this book, something which is genuinely lovely to read amidst all the darkness. Another thing that should give us hope (especially those of us hoping for more than friendship between these two) is that finally they have each made the connection for themselves; by the end of the novel, each has admitted their true feelings to themselves, at least. We can only hope the theme of disconnection doesn't find its way to Book 7!

## ROMANCE

While we're on the subject of Strike and Robin's relationship, you can be sure that the topic will be heavily discussed during our read through of *The Ink Black Heart*. We realize that many fans (including ourselves!) were hoping for and even expecting this to be the book in which Robin and Strike finally admitted their feelings to each other, but there is so much to be found in this novel regarding their friendship and their feelings—from sexual tension to self admissions of love to wounds to the heart, we are going to be kept quite busy! Over the next couple of years, while we eagerly anticipate the seventh book (sure in the knowledge that this time they will have to kiss) we will have a rich mine of speculation concerning how Strike will behave





## THE FANDOM IN THE INK BLACK HEART

now that he's finally opened his eyes, or what the exact impact of DCI Murphy on their relationship will be.

### MEN BEHAVING BADLY

On our latest episode where we discussed our initial reactions to the book, we joked that *The Ink Black Heart* - and in fact the entire *Strike* series - should be called 'Men Behaving Badly'. The different forms that misogyny takes in contemporary society, and the many ways in which men abuse and mistreat the women in their lives, is a running theme throughout the *Strike* novels. This holds true for *The Ink Black Heart*, in which there is a vast spectrum of bad behaviour: from abusive and sexist fathers, to men who groom young girls for sex, to abusive or violent reactions to romantic rejection (footnote: although it isn't only men who are guilty of this here, as we see with

Madeline), the book is full of men behaving very badly indeed. The most prominent manifestation of misogyny and sexual entitlement in the book, however, is in its proliferation online. In toxic fandom spaces and across social media, the relentless harassment doled out to women by pickup artists and incels (*"If you'd ever been a woman online..."* as Robin tells Strike) is a central feature of the novel. At its most sinister (and most accurate), *The Ink Black Heart* depicts the indoctrination of boys and vulnerable young men into these communities, and the tragic consequences that ensue.

Yet amidst the violence and hatred, there are some small rays of hope. The introduction of Ryan Murphy, and his respectful treatment of Robin as she fumbles her way to accepting his offer of a date, is one of these. And then there is Strike himself. True, he too is guilty of some bad behaviour—for example,

his continuing tendency to enter relationships as a distraction from his feelings for Robin, or to lie to his girlfriends in order to avoid conflict. However, his behaviour towards his partner throughout the book is a stark and refreshing contrast to the sexual entitlement other men display. His immediate acceptance of Robin's non-verbal "no" on her birthday at the Ritz; the continuing friendship and support he offers his partner (he helps her move! He puts her name on the door!); his disgust for the men who groom and abuse young girls; all of these serve as

confirmation that, as Rowling says in the acknowledgements of *The Ink Black Heart*, #notallbeards.

We have only scratched the surface here of all there is to think and talk about in this novel; we hope that you'll join us when our close reading of *The Ink Black Heart* begins in October! If you'd like to learn more about *The Strike & Ellacott Files*, you can visit our website at [www.thesefilespod.com](http://www.thesefilespod.com) and listen wherever you get your podcasts.

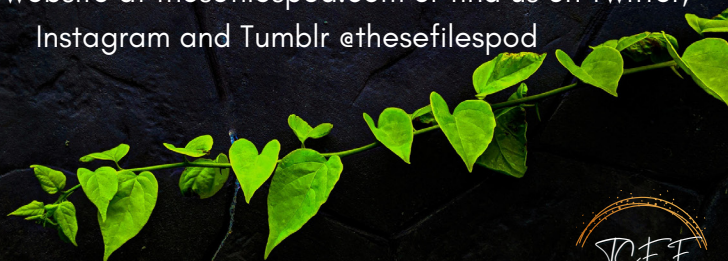
Kenz, Lindsay and Pools from  
The Strike & Ellacott Files

# The Strike & Ellacott Files

A Cormoran Strike podcast made by fans for fans, and a  
StrikeFans.com affiliate

**Back Next Month with Regular  
Episodes Covering *The Ink Black  
Heart***

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BY RAPHAEL TAFURI

# THE INK WHITE TROUBLED HEART OF EVIL



Being one of many Rowling-made book lovers in my generation, I have always sung her plenty of praise for turning me into an investigative reader. Her texts are full of hidden clues that sometimes only a second (or third or tenth) reread can help you connect all the dots. She trained us quite well with the seven books from that other series.

Cue to mid-2013 and there we all were, all of a sudden rushing to get our hands on *The Cuckoo's Calling* after finding out who had actually written it. I got home super excited with my book one day and plopped down on the couch, shoes barely off, starving for a new Rowling tale. That rush of excitement, sadly for me at least, couldn't survive past page thirty-seven, for that is where

John Bristow left Strike's office after hiring him to investigate the perfect crime, which John himself had committed, and the text left me with no doubts it had been him. But this is Rowling we're talking about, right? The one person who had taught me to read for clues wouldn't be so obvious about her ending. This must be a decoy to hide the true killer, or so I thought.

Now, I know there are all types of readers out there, looking for uncountable different things in a novel, and the brilliance of Rowling is that her writing is captivating enough to attract and fulfil the wildest varieties of expectations, but what this old fan here thought he had with him was a ticket to embark in a great web of secrets, intricate enough to give Mr. Holmes a run for his money.

Fast forward a couple of years and as I am halfway through *Career of Evil*, Ray Williams opens the door of the house and he's so off the set, so willing to show he's a good guy that I immediately know he's the serial killer Strike's looking for and now I just need to see how he'll fit the three-person suspect list we had. 2022's *The Ink Black Heart* has Gus Upcott doing the very same thing, hiding in plain sight, an innocent persona for everyone to see while close to the victims of his true self, just like the book told you time and time again that Anomie was. Just like Ray Williams, a.k.a., Donald Laing did.

It was unavoidable, while attentively reading the thousand pages of *The Ink Black Heart*, to detect traces from the previous five Strike novels. Hints solved themselves in front of my eyes not because I was cracking the case, but because I had seen them happen before inside the books of this very series, beyond the suspension of disbelief of the real world and other crime novels I have read.

Both Donald Laing (*Career of Evil*) and Janice Beattie (*Troubled Blood*) are textbook serial killers, with Laing choosing his victims a bit more randomly than Beattie. John Bristow (*The Cuckoo's Calling*) and Gus Upcott (*The Ink Black Heart*) kill people close to them who were getting in their way and both men start killing more recklessly as the investigations proceed. John Bristow, Donald Laing, Raphael Chiswell (*Lethal White*), and Janice Beattie have all killed someone before the main murders of their respective books take place. If you want to, you can also add Liz Tassel (*The Silkworm*) to this list, although she's responsible for writing the parody that made Fancourt's wife kill herself, not for directly murdering the woman and that is a whole different discussion for another time. Laing, Chiswell, and Upcott try to kill Robin. Bristow and Upcott stab Strike, but only Upcott causes real damage, even though the epilogue (in this latest book called coda, a



word more widely related to music to the external eye, similar to our killer) makes it clear our hero will be up and about soon enough.

The weird aftertaste *The Cuckoo's Calling* left on me, the one making me feel Rowling hadn't been successful at hiding her secrets until the end, which is the most unRowlingish (see what I did there?) thing she could ever do until now, is nothing compared to what this coda in *The Ink Black Heart* did.

Rowling today sits at a very comfortable chair in the literary world, where she is allowed to write and publish any book she desires, no matter how short or long, no matter how many books in a series. She still sells like water, despite the endless attempts of several people on twitter to change that (although, after finishing *The Ink Black Heart*, I am more inclined than ever to question the honest number of individual people throwing hate at her). Rowling has the most desirable



THE SILKWORM, COVER ARTWORK (LITTLE, BROWN AND CO.)



treasure a published writer could seek: space. If she wants her sixth in a series of probably ten books to be a full thousand pages long, the book will be a thousand pages long and people will buy it and they will read it.

Which begs the question of how, simply how, did a mastermind of planned storytelling like Rowling give me a book as long as *The Ink Black Heart* and still manage to write an incredibly rushed ending without answering virtually none

being presented in the book. In the case of *The Ink Black Heart*, I asked myself, above anything else, “How will Drek’s Game crumble after Anomie is caught?” and, closer to the final moments, “Will Maverick Studios keep Harty a heart or will they go ahead and change him into a person?” Both questions remain unanswered. I agree that these are not the answers the Strike and Ellacott Detective Agency was hired to investigate and discover, but I am positive a book as long and thorough as this one could

## How can a thousand pages seem like too long and not enough at the same time?

of the questions I had? How can a thousand pages seem like too long and not enough at the same time?

When you read a crime novel, by definition despite exceptions, in the end you’ll have all the answers to the most basic questions: who did it, why they did it, how they did it. Once you know these questions will be answered, you start focusing on other more interesting and yet smaller questions. They tend to be more specifically related to the plot

have a few lines dedicated to the aftermath of the case. It did make a huge fuss about placing Robin’s name on the front glass.

Over twenty years ago, Rowling famously said, “I like reading a book where I have the sense that the author knows everything. They might not be telling me everything, but you have that confidence that the author really knows everything”<sup>1</sup> and the then thirteen-year-old boy who

speaks to you now gave himself in complete surrender to her works, not only because he agreed with her, but because her own writing proved she did know everything.

After a thousand pages of *The Ink Black Heart*, I am willing to agree that Rowling knows everything there is to know about Cormoran Strike and Robin Ellacott and how their lives will be like and when they'll finally kiss and get married. I am more than confident she has every little answer to most of the questions all fans, myself included, have. But for the very first time, after more than twenty years and twenty publications, I was left with the strange feeling that she hadn't thought it all through in regards to the criminal case.

Just as in her ventures into movie-writing, the Strike novels have Rowling merging two massive stories in one. Here, she gives us a slow-burn love story that is getting more and more of our attention and expectations. The Strike-Ellacott relationship is the thread that makes these books a true series, the overall storyline that keeps the readers coming back for more. For each individual work, though, she presents us with what is supposed to be a different crime and that's where those books should stand out from one another, but don't. Maybe that is the reason why my favourite of the six remains *Troubled Blood*, the cold case is ironically fresh for the

series and a change in the way the investigation goes. *The Ink Black Heart*, on the other hand, reverts back to a crime that feels like a mix of *The Cuckoo's Calling* and *Career of Evil*.

The mere thought, the slightest possibility, the faintest trace of such an idea as "this is beneath Rowling" seemed absurd to me for all this time especially considering that this is a novel mostly about fandom toxicity; a topic on which, regardless of how many times she explicitly states otherwise, her original fandom can sadly provide plenty of material. So much so that the task of writing this piece, frankly stating how *The Ink Black Heart* rubbed me off in the wrong way, while trying my hardest not to become one of the many Anomie acolytes shown in the book, presented itself as a rather fun challenge. After almost a decade and six books later, this book should be as enthralling as all her other works have been so far. This is what we have grown accustomed to getting from Rowling's writing, and not countless pages going in circles around their own plot.

Perhaps, and here I am, like an old and wise wizard once said, "journeying into thickets of wildest guess-work", this might be one of the reasons Jo, the person, has decided to keep writing her Strike novels behind the transparent mask of Robert Galbraith, instead of using her original pen name.

When you open a J.K. Rowling novel, you expect a fresh tale to unfold before your eyes. You want to dive into a well-structured world inhabited by greatly-constructed characters who will guide you through so many brilliantly-hidden clues that the ending will seem completely unexpected and yet totally right within that narrative. But *The Ink Black Heart* isn't a J.K. Rowling novel, it's a Robert Galbraith one and, at the end of the day, this fella simply isn't as good as Rowling.

I still don't know what to expect before I open the seventh book by Robert Galbraith, for I most certainly will, but I hope beyond reason that I don't find myself committed to days of dragging myself through a predictable plot with repeated patterns that make me so often point to my kindle screen and say, "Hey, here's (insert previous Strike book) again!"

### **Footnotes:**

[1]: J.K. Rowling: Harry Potter and Me (2001)

[2]: Talking about kindle, how sad it is to see that most of the many one-star reviews the book now has on Amazon are because of the ill formatting of the in-game user chats that are indeed painful to read on the kindle screen? A technical error, totally unrelated to the author's storytelling abilities, is making the general score plummet because readers are having trouble

getting through key parts of the book.

[3] In a pure example of a "bad if I do, bad if I don't" case, she really wrote a full comic-con in 2015 London, dressed Strike as Darth Vader, had plenty of cosplayers all around, put Anomie in a Batman mask and not a single person there was dressed up as a wizard? Really?

[4] Let's not forget how much we all hate uptalk? She annoyed all of us with it? The way she wanted to? I'm positive we could all perfectly hear the person talking? And it was so annoying? And she did it with writing? And later in the book it happened again? And she deserves lots of praise for this? Good job, I guess?



### **Cormoran Strike**

Private detective, ex-Royal Military  
Police Special Investigation Branch  
investigator and illegitimate son of  
famous rock star Jonny Rokeby



The Rowling Library  
Famous ~~Writers~~ Cards Collection  
**DETECTIVE**



September proceeded, cool and unsettled. Strike called Lucy to say sorry for being rude about her sons, but she remained cold even after the apology, doubtless because he'd merely expressed regret for voicing his opinion out loud, and hadn't retracted it.

*Troubled Blood*  
*Robert Galbraith*





BY CLAUDIA M.

# THE MODERN AGE

## The music of *The Strokes* in *The Ink Black Heart*

One of JK Rowling's greatest strengths as a writer is arguably making the world her characters inhabit a vivid, almost tangible one. In her latest novel, *The Ink Black Heart*, written under the pseudonym of Robert Galbraith, this is perhaps most visible in the descriptions of the titular comic, so evocative that I almost feel like I've watched it.

In the *Potter* saga, Rowling often relied on detailed descriptions that evoke the reader's senses and very precise feelings, but in the *Strike* series, she has another tool at her disposal: the carefully chosen use of real world references. While events like The Olympics in *Lethal White* or the floods in Cornwall in *Troubled Blood* serve to ground the setting, she builds well-fleshed out characters through their tastes and opinions. The use of Joni Mitchell's music, for instance, was instrumental in making Margot

Bamborough the most "alive" victim out of any mystery novel I've read.

In *The Ink Black Heart*, music also plays a big role, even helping solve the mystery that underpins the narrative. It is by recognizing references to songs and composers in online aliases that the culprit, Anomie, is finally found by the detective duo of Cormoran Strike and Robin Ellacott.

Three music groups are prominent in the novel: The Beatles, Queen and The Strokes. This last one stood out to me for having been my favorite band, and, as such, I found some of the references used obscure or even playful.

Here, I will go over this example of Rowling's brilliant approach to cultural references through the band's discography, exploring the way it is worked within the story

to develop character and setting - and also, perhaps, to give clues to Anomie's identity.

## YOUNG ADULTS TO MODERNIZE

A pun with the surly detective's name aside, the reasons for the choice of The Strokes beg investigation in the first place. Why not a British band, for starters? It has to do with one of *The Ink Black Heart*'s biggest preoccupations: cultural phenomena and the fan response to them - each of the music groups mentioned in the book are arguably 'the' bands of their generation.

Rowling has been said to be the writer of millennial culture - a significant part of which, after all, was defined by the *Harry Potter* books. This is particularly true in this novel, which aims to present the internet culture (and its ugliest face) at the moment when it was still dominated by that generation, before Gen Z and TikTok took over. Hence, Strike dressed as Darth Vader to attend Comic Con and The Strokes.

No band is more significant to millennials than The Strokes, in whom people saw the promise of resuscitating rock and roll in the early 2000s. Even Robin, who as far as we know is more into radio-friendly pop music than anything else, recognized the references employed. It is this ubiquitousness that makes it a landmark of the

generation Rowling is aiming to portray, and shows a deliberate and careful choice on the author's part.

Now zooming in, we see how similar choices are used to flesh out and give insight into characters.

## THEY'LL THRILL YOU OR SEDATE YOU BUT THEY WILL NEVER LET YOU SEE

*'What was he [Josh] like?' Robin asked Zoe.*

*'Stoned,' said Zoe with a sad smile.  
'Mostly. 'E didn't like meetin' people. 'E stayed in 'is room a lot an' 'e kept playin' that Strokes song, "Is This It" over an' over again... and then 'e set fire to the room.'*

Handsome, with the appearance of a rock star, frequently inebriated and adored by his fans, Josh Blay might as well have been one of The Strokes. In fact, the description of his high cheekbones, long dark hair, square jaw and large blue eyes could easily have been based on the band's lead guitarist, Nick Valensi. And yet, *Is this it* is one of the mellowest, least "rock and roll" tracks released by the group. Instead of rebellion, it has a repetitive and resigned quality to it, both in melody and lyrics:

*Can't you see I'm trying?  
I don't even like it  
I just lied to  
Get to your apartment  
Now I'm staying*



NICK VALENSI (PHOTO BY RAPH\_PH, CREATIVE COMMONS)

*There just for a while  
I can't think 'cause  
I'm just way too tired  
Is this it?*

I find Josh one of the most interesting characters of the novel. Even Strike is surprised by his assessments of himself and others, but those qualities were hidden. In his negligence around the bullying that Edie was suffering, in his willingness to believe lies about her, which ultimately lead to tragedy, he seems to embody the themes of the novel: disconnection, delusion, blindness.

The song he plays on repeat the day before he is paralyzed and his ex-girlfriend is killed not only foreshadows the thoughtful character we'll see later, but also speaks of someone stuck in a sad,

hazy loop of self-delusion and inaction.

Then, he falls asleep under the influence and wakes up to find his room on fire.

And here Rowling's playful side comes out: While *Is this it* is the name of The Stroke's first album, their second album is entitled *Room on Fire*. The original lyric comes from the song *Reptilia* (*The room is on fire and she's fixing her hair*), a line that also encapsulates this idea of 'turning a blind eye', so central to the novel.

## **SILENTLY OBSESSED WITH DEATH**

**Anomie:** *just realised im plagiarising*

**Anomie:** *Id on't want what you want*

**Anomie:** *I dont feel what you feel*  
**Anomie:** *hgeart in a cage*

After the old school era of *Is this it/Room on Fire* came The Stroke's third album, *First Impressions of Earth*, home of the song mentioned by Anomie, *Heart in a cage*. The album's sound veer away from the cheery, cool vibe of the first two, towards heavier and more progressive rock, and this track might yet be considered its darkest song.

*I don't write better when I'm stuck  
in the ground  
So don't teach me a lesson 'cause  
I've already learned  
Yeah, the sun will be shining and  
my children will burn  
Oh, the heart beats in its cage  
(...)  
All our friends, they're laughing at  
us  
All of those you loved, you mistrust  
Help me, I'm just not quite myself  
Look around, there's no one else left*

Once again, insight into the character's psychology can be found in the music he unwittingly quotes. Its bleak, disturbed lyrics speak of someone tormented by being stuck, dissatisfied with their life and with loneliness, and even struggling with the creative impulse. But unlike Josh's, Anomie's suffering is not a resigned and numb one; it is, instead, dangerous and destructive.

## **YOU'RE HIDIN' IN THE**

## **BACKGROUND BUT YOU WANNA BE FOUND**

*'If a disordered personality's found something that speaks to them on a level they've never experienced before, any criticism from the creator, or any change to the work, might feel like a personal attack.'*

When I read the aforementioned chat and recognized the lyrics to *Heart in a cage*, I had the thrill of figuring out a clue before the detectives did – the Strokes had, already, been mentioned in relation to two suspects.

However, when the resolution came, and although music played a big part in the reveal, there was no obvious link between the band and the culprit. Had it only been a red herring? Or, as the 'room on fire' line would suggest, some clues are just more subtly presented?

The very first mention we have of the band is when Robin is watching a video by Kea Niven, one of the suspects for Anomie. She recognizes the "pink, yellow and blue" design on her shirt as the cover of a Strokes album – *Angles*, released in 2011 after a four-year hiatus.

While I listened to it on repeat when it was released, the reception by fans and critics was mixed at best. After years apart, it was clear they were trying to find their footing again and doing so by experimenting. The 80's

influences and use of synthesizers was enough to upset many fans who missed the catchy riffs from the first couple of albums.

It is a nice character touch to have a former couple (Kea and Josh) liking the same music. And of course, people like different things with different intensities. But if Anomie is a Strokes fan and were to choose a T-shirt featuring one of the band's albums... it likely wouldn't be this one.

### WHOSE CULTURE IS THIS AND DOES ANYBODY KNOW?

*'Which means somebody who listens to Queen, and the Beatles, possibly because he hasn't got a—'*

What I find most interesting about the way Rowling attributes cultural preferences to her characters is that frequently they aren't born of who they are, but rather linked to mere circumstance. The song that plays at Robin's wedding was not chosen because the lyrics or melody particularly resonate with her and Matthew, but because it was popular around the time they started dating. This makes the characters relatable and well-rounded, as if they could exist in our world.

In this novel, nobody likes anything without a reason. Inigo Upcott might have had the talent for classical music, but he liked rock and roll in rebellion against his Bishop father. Pez Pierce may

recognize the cliché of being Liverpudlian and liking The Beatles, but he's still got a tattoo of the band (and I can't be the only one wondering why his birth place was mentioned so much).

In this world, Anomie's music references are peculiar for being so eclectic: from classical composers to The Beatles, to Queen, to The Strokes. By the end of the novel, each of these is explained... but this last one.

Gus Upcott's knowledge of classical music comes from his training; of The Beatles and Queen, by his father's taste in music (so that Anomie listens to them 'possibly because he hasn't got a...' choice).

So what about The Strokes? We have a clue in Robin's perception about Anomie's knowledge of The Beatles.

*'What's wrong with that?'*

*'Well, I had to look up who Pete Best was.'*

*'You're kidding?'*

*'No,' said Robin, amused by Strike's expression of mild outrage.*

*'The Beatles broke up fourteen years before I was born, you know.'*

*(...) 'you're right... but I'd've slid straight past that. It wouldn't have registered at all.'*

Although exceptions exist, the



most likely reason Anomie, just as Josh Blay, Kea Niven, and, implicitly, Vikas Bhardwaj, like The Strokes couldn't be more straightforward: their age. At a point where Inigo Upcott and Nils de Jong are among the biggest suspects left, other than Gus Upcott, in truth they just don't fit the right generation.

### THAT'S AN ENDING THAT I CAN'T WRITE

*Sometimes they see things that – well, not that aren't there, but that we never saw or intended.*

Unlike *Troubled Blood*, where every single red herring is explained, every plot thread neatly tied up by the end, I found *The Ink Black Heart*'s more loose in its resolution. Some mysteries are left open to interpretation.

Who did, in fact, set fire to Josh's

Blay room, allowing Anomie the dangerous knowledge of the rendezvous to take place at Highgate Cemetery the following day? Is the reference to 'room on fire' a wink to the reader, a clue, or just an unconscious result of J.K. Rowling's research?

In writing about a novel that explores the meaning fans assign to the properties they're attached to, it'd be remiss to ignore that the symbolisms suggested here may not have ever been intended by the author.

Regardless, it is certainly a mark of strong writing when symbolism and characterization can be inferred from the smallest details. And, in a story where so much tragedy happens because people don't open their eyes... I don't think Rowling would mind us looking.



THE STROKES (PHOTO BY ROGER WOOLMAN, CREATIVE COMMONS)

## A QUOTE BY JO



“But the central theme of the book is anomie, which is a state of lacking normal social or moral norms. And – so, yeah, it’s really an exploration of that. It is a very sort of modern malaise.

Although the term anomie has been around for a long, long time and it really – the term arose through industrialisation. People losing meaning in their daily lives and – and feeling that they themselves were not really part of society.”

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