



Wicked Game

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Age is catching up with Robert Finlay, a police officer on the Royalty Protection team based in London. He's looking forward to returning to uniform policing and a less stressful life with his new family. But fate has other plans. Finlay's deeply traumatic, carefully concealed past is about to return to haunt him. A policeman is killed by a bomb blast, and a second is gunned down in his own driveway. Both of the murdered men were former Army colleagues from Finlay's own SAS regiment, and in a series of explosive events, it becomes clear that he is not the ordinary man that his colleagues, friends and new family think he is. And so begins a game of cat and mouse—a wicked game—in which Finlay is the target, forced to test his long-buried skills in a fight against a determined and unidentified enemy. Wicked Game is a taut, action-packed, emotive thriller about a man who might be your neighbor, a man who is forced to confront his past in order to face a threat that may wipe out his future, a man who is willing to do anything to protect the people he loves. But is it too late?

Wicked Game Details

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Author : Matt Johnson

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From Reader Review Wicked Game for online ebook

Eva says

Having seen some amazing book blogger ratings about the second book in this series (Deadly Game), I decided to give this one a go first, as Dee-logic dictates to always start at the beginning of a series. Which in this case isn't so bad. In other cases when there are already five or more books, it's a bit more problematic. But I digress.

Robert Finlay, a former SAS Member, is giving up his job on the Royal Protection team. He's happily married, has a beautiful daughter and wants to lead a less stressful life. But his past is about to catch up with him when his former SAS colleagues start dying all over the place. Someone is playing a wicked game. (Get it?) Who can Robert trust?

Admittedly, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. I didn't even really know what the book was about as I try to read as little of a description as I possibly can since a lot of them contain way too many spoilers for my liking. But I have faith in my book blogger friends and I soon realised my trust in them was not misplaced. I quickly became completely engrossed as I tried to fit the pieces of the puzzle together and ended up suspecting pretty much everyone in this cat-and-mouse game.

This is one cleverly constructed plot, with some nail biting moments. At the end of the book, I felt utterly exhausted, like I'd gone through the entire thing myself. That's all down to Matt Johnson's amazing writing. Quite obviously, he knows what he's talking about and it adds that extra level of authenticity to the reading experience.

This would make an excellent movie or tv series. (Preferably with Richard Armitage in it. Just saying'.) I could see scenes play out right before my eyes. Such a thrilling ride.

Wicked Game is tense and dramatic. Highly intelligent and adrenaline fuelled, with some fabulous plot twists. I doubt I'll be waiting long to read the next one in the series.

Susan Hampson says

Well don't you just love it when you start reading a book like this and you know, you just know that this author has seen more than his fair share of action! It is on another level not just the technical stuff but that raw gut feeling, the adrenaline rush of how it would make you feel in that situation. Well this is it. Matt Johnson delivers characters that feel pain, emotion and fear.

Robert Finlay is a pretty cool character. Married with a child his family know nothing about his secret past, that is until the past comes searching for him as old S.A.S. colleagues begin to meet untimely ends. There is a lot story and plenty of action as Finlay has to decide if he waits for his past to catch up with him or does he hunt it down himself. He needs answers but who do you trust when the numbers are diminishing?

There are some pretty sit on the edge of your seat moments because you know certain events are unstoppable and you can't avoid what will happen. A cracking book right to the end. Jenny was mint!

Kate says

Enjoyed this. Tense and chilling thriller written by an author who clearly knows what he's writing about.

Liz Barnsley says

Wicked Game is an incredible thriller. In fact I'm not even sure I like to call it a thriller (even though it thrills) because that often brings to mind banging action with very little depth elsewhere (nothing wrong with that, books are for all seasons) but Wicked Game is full of depth and feeling. Chock full of it. Plus thrills as well. You can't go wrong really.

Robert Finlay is also an incredible character. Keeping the reader hooked into a story is often the job of the main protagonist and in Robert Finlay Matt Johnson has created a perfect storm. Challenged and flawed, the author shows us that which defines him, throws us into his world and then throws all of us off a cliff. Robert lives a much quieter life until a series of events bring his past into sharp focus - suddenly he is having to remember who he was, the man he thought he had left behind and it is an engaging, emotive and yes exciting journey.

Excellent character study aside this novel is also genuinely thrilling - you know, that little feeling you get in the pit of your stomach when action is jumping off the page at you - Wicked Game has that in spades and will often get the reading adrenalin going. Taking reality and weaving fiction around it is one of the obvious strengths of this author - nothing in this book is unbelievable, an authenticity that hits hard, unsurprising in some ways considering Matt's background. However knowing it doesn't mean you can necessarily write it and make people understand the terror and the horror and the kind of inner strength it takes to deal with such unimaginable situations - this author can and does. From first page to last.

Wicked Game builds the tension in an intelligent and emotional way, has many layers to both time, place and sense of character and is basically a top notch "thriller" that has a dark heart and an emotional soul. It is not a book that will be read and then forgotten - this one will stay with you. As such it gets the highly recommended tag from me and in my "most anticipated" stakes the follow up to Wicked Game is somewhere high up my list. Excellent, thought provoking, clever and beautifully written.

Lisa says

This is a temporary rating based on 19%. If I ever come back and, I may change it.

I quit because it felt so much more like an autobiography than a story. so many sentences staying with "I". So little literary interest. I really wonder what all the great reviews are based on.

sigh.

Christine says

I've always been a fan of thrillers, with the build up of tension, the action packed heroics and insane bravery. Wicked Game is a stonkingly accessible British thriller, with its roots firmly set in recent UK history and a

strong sense of authenticity running through it. Although it takes a while to get going, it soon holds your attention to the max.

The story introduces us to Robert Finlay, a police inspector in his forties. Finlay has an interesting and intriguing back story. He is former SAS having worked in Northern Ireland, during the Troubles and was involved in the Iranian Siege of 1980. Who doesn't remember the vivid images of that on the TV news? He also worked protecting members of the Royal Family.

Finlay is now happily married to Jenny, with a daughter and has moved to Stoke Newington. He has a very unglamorous role, in uniform. Ex-SAS servicemen, who have become serving police officers, are being hunted down and cold-bloodedly murdered. Soon it becomes apparent that Finlay is a target and is in mortal danger. Why is someone seeking revenge on ex-SAS? And who can Finlay trust?

Wicked Game promises a real look into the world of the SAS and what it is like to live with those kind of memories. The scenes of Finlay getting up to all kinds of SAS antics and the camaraderie between the servicemen fascinated me. He has skills. Exciting stuff! It really is not a world that we hear about much. It all is increasingly relevant today with the escalating paranoia and climate of fear. Terrorism is very current in our minds.

If you enjoy action thrillers, get your hands on Wicked Game. And check out some of the images of the Iranian Siege out there, to give you a taste of what Robert Finlay got up to. Recommended.

Travis says

It's official, I'm hopelessly hooked on this series!!!!

Anne says

I'll start by saying that when I read the blurb for Wicked Game, I was unsure as to whether this book would be for me. I'm not the target market, and whilst I enjoy thrillers, I've never been compelled to read the SAS / Army type novels that are very popular. However, Wicked Game is published by Orenda Books, a small publisher that I trust, so I hedged my bets, and took a gamble. That gamble paid out - I won, the book won, Matt Johnson won and Orenda won! Wicked Game took me completely by surprise, it's a compelling, page-turning, heart quickening read and I enjoyed every moment of it.

Robert Finley is returning to uniform policing after years as a Royal Protection officer, it's been a tough job, always on-call, fraught with danger and stressful. Not that Robert can't cope with that, for he served for many years in the SAS and was heavily involved with fighting the IRA, and the siege at the Iranian Embassy. But he's older, he's now married with a small daughter, and it's time to take things a little easier.

Ah, the best laid plans, and all that Suddenly, policemen are being killed. Car bombs, drive-by shootings, even an suicide bomber in India. At first it seems like these are random attacks, but it isn't long before Finlay starts to make a connection - these guys were all his former SAS colleagues, and somebody is after him next.

What follows is a complex and tense story involving the Government, high-ranking Police and Army officers and a bunch of terrorists who are determined to get their man. Whilst the story is very complicated, Matt Johnson is a very skilful author and is able to tell the tale very eloquently. His descriptive prose and his very

accessible terminology enables the reader to follow the story very well.

Matt Johnson's voice is authoritative, he has obviously drawn much of this story from his own life, and this adds an authentic voice to what is a gripping and quite frantic story of espionage, misplaced loyalties, revenge, retribution and double-crossing. With twists and turns, and red herrings at every corner, *Wicked Game* is an impressive debut, and I am delighted to hear that the author is planning more for Robert Finley, let's hope it's soon!

<http://randomthingsthroughmyletterbox...>

Sam (Clues and Reviews) says

In preparation for the *Deadly Game* blog tour, I decided to read *Wicked Game* by Matt Johnson. Mind you neither of these books are something I am normally drawn into reading, however, when Orenda asks you to read one of their publications, you trust in Karen and fall in line. So, that's what I did.

Robert Finley, an ex-Army operative, is living a simple, monotonous life with his wife and daughter. He likes it that way. However, when a man connected to Robert's past is killed, he finds himself thrown back into the past, into a life he has tried to leave behind. What results is an encapsulating whirlwind thriller that kept me engaged and flipping the pages.

This one reminded me of novels like *I Am Pilgrim* (which I read for my book club) and the *Jack Reacher* series; character heavy, plot heavy and absolutely engaging. This is not a book to peruse casually; once you have entered Robert's world, expect to be sucked in.

The novel opens with some seemingly random events and, to be truthful, I was initially quite confused with all the characters being introduced. However, once the story began to come together, I was impressed. What seems like random breadcrumbs, in fact, becomes a complete puzzle as Johnson weaves and binds all bits of the plot together.

Johnson creates a stellar character in Robert Finley. When the novel opens, he is just your everyday guy, but then once his past is revealed, he becomes so much more complex! He is sort of an anti-hero type and as his past and present actions are revealed, I found myself rooting for him.

After reading this book, I cannot wait for *Deadly Game* and am expecting some big things...no pressure or anything.

I rated this one a 4/5 stars.

Thebooktrail says

Visit the locations in the novel: the booktrail of *Wicked Game*

When I was first given a copy of this book to review, I did wonder if it would be my kind of read . What do I know about the IRA and the SAS and would I be able to understand it all? Well kudos to you Matt Johnson

and I feel more than part of the team.

Talk about a kick ass novel. From the very first page, I was shocked into holding my breath. It reads like an action movie but with all the bubbling tension in-between, some of it so quite and subtle that Matt lulls you into a sense of false security and then BANG! he thumps you, shocks you, jolts you into submission before doing it all again.

This was a world I had heard about on the news and from friends working in embassies etc but never have I read such accounts from the men and women working in the police, services or even the side of the terrorists. How their minds work, how they think justice is being done and what motives them? Tell you something, it makes you think.

I realise now that this is the book I've been missing – one that shows how government, big brother, call it what you will works, how one force works with another, how terrorists work and how authorities must work together to to and trap such a threat.

The bond between the soldiers was particularly nicely done – the funeral scene choked me up! The whole plot and pace were brilliantly done and if Hollywood action thrillers were half as meaty as this, I'd be at the front of the queue.

Bloody brilliant. Can I use that word in a review? It's a book about the SAS so I think it needs a hard hitting punchy opinion to end on.

Jen says

Now, I have always loved me a good thriller, a bit of the cat and mouse chase and perhaps a touch of espionage or covert mission/secret service action style plotting. I used to read loads as a teenager, with a particularly soft spot for Tom Clancy novels and good old Jack Ryan. I also loved me a good police procedural. Now I can find plenty of the latter which really float my boat reading wise and I have been a very happy reader of late. I also found Rachel Amphlett's Dan Taylor series which has more than satisfied my craving for the the old action and intrigue. (Coincidentally you can catch a brilliant interview between Rachel and Matt over at Rachel's blog page <http://www.rachelamphlett.com/blog>.) Imagine my absolute joy when I started reading (or more accurately listening to) Wicked Game and got a little bit of everything; policemen, terrorism covert operations and absolute edge of the seat action. One very happy camper right here, I can tell you.

So. This book really opens with a bang. Not quite literally, although there is an explosion in the first few pages which really sets up the expectation for the rest of the book. I kind of thought maybe the pair we first meet were important. That these were characters we were going to follow. And we did. For a few yards out of the confines of the airport before they were toast. Now I know this sounds awful but that surprise factor really did make me smile. It soon became clear just who was really going to be key to this whole story, but not yet why. And as Matt Johnson introduces us to the novel's central protagonist, Robert Finlay, you start to get a real flavour of what this book is about.

The book is written from two perspectives. The first is the omniscient narrator, with whom we take the journey of all of the secondary characters in the book. The other character, written in first person, is Finlay. Now we spend a lot of time with Finlay as he navigates his changes in job from Royal Protection to Inspector at Stoke Newington Police Station, and also as he sets the scene for some of the key events which shape the present day.

We travel back in time with Finlay to a period in the history of Northern Ireland when terrorism was still rife and Finlay was serving in the SAS. The story also takes us to the Iranian Embassy siege and references the death in service of WPC Yvonne Fletcher, all highly emotive events, and amongst those which shaped the authors own life. It is this understanding, this authenticity, which rings through the narrative with such emotional clarity that you do not need graphic detail to understand the impacts of these events upon the people who experienced them. The story moves seamlessly between past and present, but it is in the present day that we see the most action, and the biggest impact upon Finlay.

Now I won't go too far into plot as this book deserves to be read for itself to be fully appreciated. Finlay is a complex character, one shaped by his past but focused on his future, one which now includes extra responsibilities; a wife and daughter. As he and his police colleagues start to be targeted and killed in terrorist style attacks, you are left wondering which, if any, of the events above could be at the root of the deaths. There is no warning, no mercy, and the killers appear to be unperturbed by collateral damage, particularly among serving officers, as long as their targets are hit. I could understand and appreciate Finlay's reluctance to get drawn into the search for the killers, his need to protect his family, especially as they had no idea of the full extent of his past in the Armed Forces. But there was also an inevitability about his involvement. It was more a matter of how long he could hold out for.

In spite of all his training, Finlay isn't your typical action hero. A former Officer, he does not appear to have the deadly compulsion or conviction of his colleagues and with this softer edge, and at 48 years old his now softer physical edges, isn't quite as ready for the action as he may have been in his younger years. But this only serves to make him even more appealing, to make me root for him even more. It is his intellect, planning and core training as much as his physical strength which will be needed in this particular battle. There is a cheeky quality to him, one which is really brought to the fore in his interactions with his wife, and the tender moments with his daughter are beautifully written. This is a guy who has been damaged by his past, who suffers from crippling nightmares, and yet he has it all to fight for and you know damned well he will.

The tension in this book was palpable. The energy with which the action hit was like a fist in the gut at times. I really must stop listening to thrillers like this while I'm driving as I'm certain one day I'm either going to get a speeding ticket when my heart and mind try to keep up with the pace, or end up like 'Driving Miss Daisy' as I slow to concentrate on what I am listening to. There were some chucklesome moments when the descriptions used brought a genuine smile to my face, but also those moments when I wanted to channel out all that was going on around me to focus only on the story. Not ideal when in heavy traffic on the M6. Oops

There are so many elements of misdirection in this book, false leads which take you up the garden path and back again, that anything you think you know will most likely be wrong. In a story built around secrets, where people are skilled in the art of lying and evasion, can you really trust anything or anyone? Probably not. But you will still care. Very much so. About Finlay. About his family. About his colleague Jones. You will want them to come good. You will want them to win. That is the emotion you will feel with the way in which this book is written. A wonderful blend of action and emotion; a plot which is as gripping and measured as it is explosive. I needed to know how it would end and I now need to read book two.

Bring it on.

An explosive and emotive 5 stars from me.

Rebecca Bradley says

I absolutely blew through this book. I couldn't put it down. I was immersed in the life of Robert (Bob) Finlay and all that happened to him. The authenticity that Matt Johnson's own life has brought to the novel is obvious from the outset and with the book reading in first person PoV you do feel as though you are living someone's life.

What I particularly liked about this, and I don't really read many thrillers of this type, is how Finlay is an older male who is settled down with a wife and child and is feeling his age a little. He's not some fit, handsome superhero. He's an ordinary man, who has made career choices that have put him in extraordinary situations, which in turn have led him down a path where he has to face difficult decisions.

It's this normality about Finlay that appealed to me and kept me reading. The believability of the story. The authenticity.

Even if you don't normally read this kind of book, I'd really recommend you give it a try. You won't be disappointed.

With thanks to the author and publisher, Karen at Orenda, for my copy.

Tony says

It may be strange – especially as I've often bemoaned those that don't read outside of or exclude genres from their reading – but the home-grown, UK-based thrillers have never been something that have appealed to me. Perhaps it's my own mundane interaction with the local constabulary or TV shows like *The Bill* or *Motorway Traffic Cops* (or whatever it's called) but I'd not really seen the potential for a gripping read there in comparison to – say – an alcoholic Norwegian detective hunting murderers in the snow or – say (again) – one-man armies called Jack chasing justice in other far-flung places....

But.... then there's *Wicked Game* by Matt Johnson. And it changes that preconception I'd held and it's a wonderful thing when a book can do that.

Wicked Game finds Robert Finlay as he leaves the Royal Protection team and heads back to uniformed Police work in his search for a quiet, normal, life with his wife and their young daughter.

Let's be honest; no character in a book or film that's looking for such a thing gets it – we all know how many detectives get pulled into stopping Armageddon just days before retirement and are all too well aware that Sergeant Murtaugh is "too old for this shit". We know from the off, then, that trouble is coming down the track for Robert, especially after the explosive start to the novel, and *Wicked Game* doesn't disappoint when it comes to the drama. Finlay is far from the standard ex-army turned police officer he's lead others to believe – he's an ex-SAS officer with a troubled past that's now kicking down the door to his longed-for quiet life and demanding his attention. Police officers are being killed. Police officers from his own SAS regiment. Secretive meetings with MI5 follow, luring him in – then there's an attempt on his own life and it quickly becomes clear that these murders won't stop until either Finlay or the killer are stopped.... but what's the motive behind the murders? Why is Finlay a target and who can be trusted?

Far from a standard game of cat and mouse, *Wicked Game* is a surprisingly complex mystery and one that reaches back in time to bring the old enemies of the past into the terrifying now with an array of action sequences, cliff-hangers and surprises that make for a great read.

The narrative split between first and third person works well (Finlay's voice is a convincing narration and lends plenty of emotional ballast to the story too) as well as very effective in keeping the reader gripped – especially as the tension grows and those third-person characters such as Grahamslaw are in possession of information Finlay isn't at crucial, life-threatening points.

They say write what you know and it's clear that Matt Johnson is writing from experience (having served as a soldier and with the Met for 25 years). When it comes to detailing the action and police-side sequences, as it were, Johnson's knowledge and insight give the novel a real sense of authenticity. He does a great job of delivering some very real and genuine sequences populated by characters underscored by a convincing authority and precision that can only come from actually knowing those people such characters are likely composites of.

But there's more than just that insider knowledge and attention to details at play here and it's that which makes *Wicked Game* well worth a read – Matt Johnson has a very real talent and gift for thriller writing. *Wicked Game* cracks along at a great pace with plenty of gripping and original plot twists and turns with a finale that wouldn't be out of place in a book with a protagonist called Reacher.

With *Wicked Game* Matt Johnson skilfully weaves together these two facets to create a compellingly gritty and convincingly real thriller.

Matt says

Managed to get my Goodreads profile set up, and the book attributed to me. I found a helpful admin within the organisation who soon had it sorted.

Now bear with me while I get other part of the profile set up. I'm just settling down having been tweeted by the one and only Peter James today.

One for the diary!

Dave says

I must confess that I have a bit of a soft spot for a good, fast-paced action thriller. Matt Johnson's *Wicked Game* delivers on all counts.

The book has an unshakeable feeling of authenticity which is woven deep into the fabric of the story, due to the author's first-hand experience as a soldier and Metropolitan Police officer. The prose is taut and to the point, especially when we're dealing with Finlay and his investigation into the killings and entirely in fitting with the character. The dealings that Finlay has with the various departments looking into the killings feels authentic, and there's a race against time to see who will get to the bad guys first.

What I particularly liked, and what puts the story into a different class for me is that Finlay is no longer the youthful SAS officer he once was and his expertise in planning, which in another thriller would have him disposing of his opponent easily, here is more believably slightly rusty. Things go wrong, and he's forced to adapt on the hoof, quite literally in some cases!

I also liked the way Matt Johnson manages to get you into the mindset of the terrorists. No cardboard cut-out baddies here – these are fully realised and well thought-out with solid, clear, if disturbing, rationales for what they're doing.

I really enjoyed Wicked Game. It's a fresh, fast-paced and authentic thriller and I'm delighted to hear that Matt is working on a second book.
