

Book review on a review of killing for company

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Brian Masters' book, *Killing for Company: The Case of Dennis Nilsen*, provides a fascinating insight into one of Britain's most notorious serial killers. It was published in 1995 by Arrow. Unlike many true crime books, Masters' remains objective, insightful and intelligently reflective throughout. His access to, and cooperation from, the killer has undoubtedly helped the author in creating such a momentous read. However, his writing style and impartial outlook are what makes this book outstanding in its own right. Since it was originally published, I have re-read this book several times, and it continues to be one of the most thought-provoking books on the topic. Masters' report is effective as it achieves its aim of delivering a fair and accurate evaluation of the case and also of the life and attitudes of Nilsen. Surprisingly, Nilsen's explanation of the murders he committed seem coherent and frank and provide an enlightening understanding of his psychological impulses. Furthermore, Masters' management of Nilsen's account demonstrates plainly a man who was perfectly sane at the time of the killings. He seems to have known what he was doing and even had his own theories for why. As the title "Killing For Company" suggests, Nilsen's key aim with his victims was to control and prevent them from leaving him. Many true crime books seem to be regurgitations of newspaper columns with a bit of one-sided and amateur lecturing to bulk them out. They often conclude with shallow comments concerning deeply disturbing subjects, in an attempt to round off the narratives into neat endings. However, Masters' book is quite different. The author managed to gain a great deal of access to the criminal he was writing about, which is relatively unusual. However, even taking this into account, his writing style is interchangeably convincing,

disturbing, and, despite the topic, painstakingly impartial. Contrasting with many books of this genre, this one contains no tedious passages. Rather, the book is absorbing all the way through.

Masters does not deny Nilsen his multifaceted, distorted humanity. However, he never does not reduce the terrible nature of his behaviour. This is an exceptionally hard achievement, to make such unreasonableness even slightly explainable, but Masters manages it skilfully. Nevertheless, even with such an expert writer as Masters, the despicable story of Nilsen stays complete, which might or might not be flattering to the imprisoned killer but ought to disturb those who are reading the book. How did such malevolence and wickedness grow from so ordinary a human existence? For how much longer would this dull man with his inflexible character have continued to murder gay men unnoticed if he had not become so self-damagingly incautious? Of course, such questions cannot be sufficiently solved by anybody, and this is perhaps the most memorable part that will remain with readers after they have finished reading this work.

Whether or not an individual is an avid reader of the true crime genre may be irrelevant to whether or not he or she will enjoy *Killing for Company*. It is vastly different from most books of this category in that it is detailed, insightful and impartial. Furthermore, the sections which offer insight and direct quotes from Nilsen himself offer a great deal that many similar studies do not. Over all, Brian Masters has created a masterpiece in this book. Although not for the faint hearted, due to its honesty, the book is a fascinating read for anyone with an interest in the subject.

References

Masters, B. (1995). *Killing for Company: The Case of Dennis Nilsen*. London: Arrow.