



## Smilla's Sense of Snow

*Peter Høeg , Tiina Nunnally (Translator)*

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She thinks more highly of snow and ice than she does of love. She lives in a world of numbers, science and memories--a dark, exotic stranger in a strange land. And now Smilla Jaspersen is convinced she has uncovered a shattering crime...

It happened in the Copenhagen snow. A six-year-old boy, a Greenlander like Smilla, fell to his death from the top of his apartment building. While the boy's body is still warm, the police pronounce his death an accident. But Smilla knows her young neighbor didn't fall from the roof on his own. Soon she is following a path of clues as clear to her as footsteps in the snow. For her dead neighbor, and for herself, she must embark on a harrowing journey of lies, revelation and violence that will take her back to the world of ice and snow from which she comes, where an explosive secret waits beneath the ice....

## Smilla's Sense of Snow Details

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Author : Peter Høeg , Tiina Nunnally (Translator)

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# From Reader Review Smilla's Sense of Snow for online ebook

## Manny says

This cult classic has a lot of things going for it. Miss Smilla is a stylish, engaging heroine with terrific dress sense, dark wit, courage under fire and fluency in Greenlandic. (I believe it's West Greenlandic if you care about that kind of thing). At one point, she performs an imaginative sex act that I've never seen described in any other place. There's a brooding sense of menace and a weird conspiracy that gradually comes together...

I don't know why I'm so bothered by the fact that the story ultimately doesn't make sense and the ending is a complete let-down. You can say the same about many great novels. I guess he fooled me into believing that he'd deliver, and he tried to make it look like he was, so I felt cheated. Damn.

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## Jeff says

Before I visited Europe, my friends would all tell me to visit Copenhagen. They said that it's one of the most beautiful European cities and the Danes are the friendliest people in Europe. Well, not in this book. Copenhagen is a dark, cold and corrupt place and the Danes, a shifty, secretive and lethal bunch.

Enter Smilla, one of the more interesting protagonists I've come across, who is half Danish and half Inuit. Here lies the dichotomy of her character: she's never truly comfortable with who she is and as she's pursuing evildoers, she's constantly at odds with the disparate elements at conflict within herself. Yet, Smilla's resourceful, obstinate, tough and droll. After a young Greenland boy, she has come to know, dies, she suspects murder and slowly begins uncovering the truth.

An excellent thriller and because it takes place in the cold, frozen north, the perfect antidote for the hot, summer weather.

Note: If you've seen the film, the book does not have the same b.s. ending.

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## Stanka says

I first saw the film. You couldn't find it in the video store under "Smilla" because it was translated (into Serbian) as "Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow." No, this is not Serbian originality: the British translation is the one with "feeling", the US one is "sensible." But it's the same book.

I guess I never knew that Greenland was a Danish province, or shall we say, a colony. So here is a book that draws together a number of interesting threads: murder mystery, post-colonialism, immigration, scientific madness, love. It's a story of a perfectly self-sufficient and self-possessed woman, Smilla, part Danish part Greenland, who discovers that the only person she's ever really cared for, Isaiah, a little boy from her building, was killed. No one else believes that murder is at stake, but Smilla knows because she knows how snow and ice behave. Of course, if you are a woman, you feel secretly proud. You enjoy the seductive eerie fact that Smilla knows and perceives details no one else around her can even begin to imagine. She is thus

outside our reach and of course, she is both more than we can hope for -- a genuine super-woman, and an utterly lonely one. This double bind makes the novel really fascinating: the stronger Smilla is, the lonelier she is. And there is something painful, wistful about her love for the dead boy: a child she never had nor ever will, a secret she must unravel but cannot resolve.

In many ways, the uncertain polarities reflect Hoeg's sense of Greenland/Denmark relations and he is keen on drawing the contrasts and hesitations as starkly as possible. Of course, some of the oppositions appear a bit too sharp to be convincing, but overall I really appreciated the love of detail and slow observation that characterize this book. My favorite aspect of this story is Smilla's unwavering resilience and her dark unflinching refusal to be duped, by either brutality or love.

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## **Sean says**

Smilla, half Kalaallit, half Dane, is taciturn and withdrawn—a wounded child grown into a dark, silent, often bitter woman. But she opens her heart to Isaiah, a young boy whom life has also wounded. When Isaiah dies, falling several stories from the snow-covered roof of a warehouse, she is forced out of her comfortable isolation to ask questions. Why had he climbed the scaffolding to play on the warehouse roof when he was terrified of heights? Why do his tracks go straight off the edge if he was merely amusing himself?

Nonetheless, it is ruled an accident. "We consider the case closed," the police tell her, but Miss Smilla has a feeling for snow, and she knows this was no accident. Isaiah was running when he went over the edge. The question she must answer is why.

What begins as a sordid tragedy unfolds slowly, inexorably, into a tense, nail-biting thriller, then a game of espionage, a cat-and-mouse game on a ship in the North Atlantic, and finally reaches its climax on a glacier-covered island off the coast of Greenland.

Høeg's plotting is devious and not always believable, but it pulled me along until the last page. For readers with a scientific bent, he has seeded the pages with references to mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry and philosophy, not to mention detailed descriptions of the harsh Greenlander way of life.

Whatever else there might be to say about this book, I am certain of one thing: I won't forget Smilla in a hurry.

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## **Harry says**

It's the first decade of the 21st century. A chill, icy wind blows in from the North, carrying with it a sociopolitical narrative of lands British and American observers have long idealized as incorporating the social democratic ideal. The icy wind that hits American shores howls through us, unprepared as we are, and dismantles one by one our precious concept of a world region that we have lazily lumped together into a bucket named Scandinavia.

We shiver.

This first decade of a new century has brought us this cold narrative that slowly shows us the errors of our ways. There is no Scandinavia: there are individual nations that show up remarkably pronounced. Sweden is

not the only Scandinavian country: there is Norway, Denmark, Greenland, Iceland, Finland. The largest nation in the region, Sweden, has no imperialistic motives: but the smallest does. There is no such thing as an Eskimo: there are Yupic and Inuit peoples.

And so intelligent readers of this frozen Nordic narrative will pause and reconsider their own fondly held preconceptions and biases and weigh them against this unfamiliar and foreign influx that has hit our shores. I say unfamiliar because not only are both British and American readers donning their down jackets and huddling together while reading and discussing political and cultural dimensions previously not known to them, but they do so while reading crime-fiction.

Americans, especially, do not normally look toward crime-fiction for their own political and societal enlightenment. So we have a problem. For like it or not, there's no editorializing from our Scandinavian friends. Laying aside commercial considerations which of course play a part, our Nordic friends are making a mass of unfamiliar material available and are not afraid to experiment and slant, and bend and crack their medium of choice in order to deliver their sociopolitical insights via crime-fiction. And they do it without frustrating the appeal of popular fiction. And in the publishing world, they do so at the frustration and exasperation of British and American crime-fiction authors.

To give a measure to this chilly invasion we can consider the late Stieg Larsson, undoubtedly the best selling author both here in the States and at home. Most readers of the crime-fiction genre (and even those outside of it) will recognize the name immediately, in part thanks to the Millennium motion pictures. The years 2008, 2009, and 2010 mark a new Millennium for American readers: Lisbeth Salander is a household name in America. And yet, in spite of Larsson's best-selling status, his work does not represent the tip of the iceberg. Larsson's novels do not represent the ice storm that precedes the cold winds that follow.

That heralded status belongs to Peter Hoeg: his novel may be the first sign of this iceberg as seen from the top of the vessel's mast; the fountainhead of our Nordic invasion is *Smilla's Sense of Snow*. Hoeg made us take notice of what was to come in this first decade of our new century. This book has the distinction of opening the American and British floodgates to Nordic waters and to this gigantic mass of ice hidden beneath the sea's surface of which it alone is the very tip.

This single novel epitomizes the Nordic invasion: it experiments with literary language, bends point of view, upsets narration, gives immediacy to tense, offers sociopolitical insights and does so while remaining faithful to popular fiction, by being wedded to an exquisite murder mystery.

And so it is 1996 and the ice storm hits our shores in the form of an unlikely heroine named Smilla Jaspersen. It'll take a few years for the book and its consequent cinematic version to gain an American audience. But it is the tip of the iceberg from which erupts an unexpected Nordic invasion throughout the following decade.

What happens when we open the book?

First a note as to translation: Tiina Nunnally does an extraordinary job translating this from Danish.

Within the first few pages we realize 3 things all at once. A) Peter Hoeg is not your workaday mystery writer, and B) we will be reading a literary mystery, and C) we are likely to be intimate with our heroine as the book is written in 1st person, present tense (not exactly American mainstream crime-fiction fare).

We can draw several conclusions from this without reading any further. If you like fast moving, plot/action

mysteries you will likely give this book a lower rating. If you are a literary romanticist and bump up against Smilla, and are given the cold shoulder *Inuit* style you will likely give this book a lower rating as well.

Nordic crime-fiction contains recurring themes: Nazi collaboration, difficult childhoods, corrupt statesmen, dark immigrant stories and in this *Smilla's Sense of Snow* opens the door to such insights via the mind of Peter Hoeg who is not afraid to experiment with the genre for which he writes. Some American readers will find it annoying that Hoeg interrupts the beautiful narrative with a mystery. But here too, Hoeg is following Scandinavian tradition by not editorializing, by his exploration of Danish and Inuit social and cultural issues: by writing crime-fiction first and foremost.

It's a cold book. It opens to the first paragraph.

*It's freezing - an extraordinary 0 degrees Fahrenheit-and it's snowing, and in the language that is no longer mine, the snow is Qanik-big, almost weightless crystals falling in clumps and covering the ground with a layer of pulverized white frost.*

The book fore spells a bone-chilling frost. Hoeg immediately makes a reference to the deep sociopolitical analysis to come: Smilla is not Danish and her language of birth has been taken from her. True to Scandinavian form, Hoeg then promptly engages us in the murder.

*Isaiah is laying with his legs tucked up under him, with his face in the snow and his hands around his head, as if he were shielding himself from the little spotlight shining on him, as if the snow were a window through which he has caught sight of something deep inside the earth.*

Everything that follows is nothing short of brilliance. Within these two paragraphs lies a secret spanning an autonomous country within the Kingdom of Denmark and the frozen Arctic seas north, if not the farthest reaches of space. Through the exquisite narration of an ice expert (and I do mean: exquisite) - Smilla, an Inuit scientist; Smilla a THule woman imbued with heartfelt but frozen emotion; Smilla, a human being endowed with extraordinary intellect; Smilla, a native woman who steps into the 21st century as if from a recorded Norse saga; Smilla, wildly deceptive as she emerges through Hoeg's fingers - through this narrative we embark on a frightening and mysterious journey lodged between an opening and an ending.

*"Smilla. Why is it that such an elegant and petite girl like you has such a rough voice?"*

*"I'm sorry," I say, "if I give you the impression that it's only my mouth that's rough. I do my best to be rough all over."*

Smilla adopts a particular way of regarding the world. She was created in beauty and is a chain of force. Evil surrounds her. It is cloaked in crystalline attraction. And as we turn invariably toward Hoeg's conclusion she will find our villain Tørk waiting...

Listen to Smilla as she tells you her story.

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## **Andrew Nixon says**

Complex characters, dizzying plot, starkly beautiful language, and tremendous psychological insights.

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## Wanda says

Actual rating: 3.5 stars.

I can see why this is on so many of the “Books You Must Read” lists—it is not your typical Nordic Noir. In fact, it may have helped to define that genre. Høeg gives us a mystery, but certainly not the now-stereotypical format of a mystery story. For one thing, Smilla is a civilian, not associated with the police in any way. Also, the mysterious aspect of this story doesn’t really seem to be the centre of the work—I think that Høeg was much more interested in the colonial relationship between Denmark and Greenland than in who killed the child, Isaiah.

It wouldn’t surprise me to learn that Stieg Larsson had read *Smilla* before he wrote his Millennium series. Lisbeth Salander seems to have many similarities to Smilla Jaspersen. Neither of them fits into Scandinavian society. Both of them have technical expertise not necessarily expected in women, Salander in computers, Jaspersen in glaciology. Both of them take physical punishment during the course of the story but it doesn’t deter them from their goals—they seem unstoppable.

Smilla is the perfect main character for exploring the Danish colonial situation—her mother is Greenlandic Inuit and her father is a rich & famous Danish doctor. She has a foot in both worlds. She is educated, but ironically in glaciology, specializing in ice & snow. Cue the old myth that the Inuit have over 100 words for snow—and Smilla references quite a few of them during the course of the book. The supposed result of having so many terms for snow was a greater understanding of that substance, and Smilla is the one who interprets Isaiah’s footprints in the snow to reveal that he was murdered.

Interesting in its historical place of inspiring the current genre of Nordic Noir and for its exploration of colonialism, but not the most satisfying murder mystery.

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## emily says

I feel like everyone I know (even my doctor, who spotted it poking out of my bag) loved this book. And I just don't get it.

Smilla makes me think of Lisbeth Salander, who was the reason I hated "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo," and I think the two books have a lot in common. They're both, at their cores, books which say "this woman is real weird and kind of unpleasant and seems like she might not bathe frequently, but everyone who meets her thinks, 'damn, you's one cool chick.'" Why do they think that? I have no idea.

Now, do not think that I'm falling into the trap that female characters can't be strong or that women have to be nice. That's not the case. What bewilders me here (as well as in TGwtDT), is that this book takes place in a world in which no one finds weird behavior puzzling. No one is like, hey, it's kind of creepy when you come into my office and think to yourself "I will just sit in absolute silence until you tell me everything I need to know, which you will somehow magically intuit."

This is also a book in which the movement of people through space is confusing. I found the layout of the ship utterly incomprehensible, and I am a person who likes boats and who is pretty good at figuring out the lay of fictional land.

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## **Rebecca Foster says**

Nordic noir *avant la lettre*? I bought this kind of by accident at a charity shop. If I'd realized it was essentially a murder mystery, I never would have taken a chance on this 1992 international bestseller. That would have been too bad, as I think it's much more interesting than your average crime thriller (she says snobbishly). For one thing, the narrator and would-be detective is Smilla Jaspersen: a 37-year-old mathematician and former Arctic expedition navigator with a Danish father and Greenland mother, she's a stylish dresser and a shrewd, bold questioner who makes herself unpopular by nosing about where she doesn't belong.

Isaiah, a little Greenland boy, has fallen to his death from the roof of their Copenhagen apartment complex, and she's convinced that foul play was involved: The boy had such a crippling fear of heights that he never would have been up there had he not been threatened or pursued. In Part I she enlists the help of a mechanic neighbor (and love interest), a translator, an Arctic medicine specialist, and a mining corporation secretary to investigate Isaiah's father's death on a 1991 Arctic expedition and how it might be connected to Isaiah's murder. In Part II she tests her theories by setting sail on the Greenland-bound *Kronos* as a stewardess and observing the crew members, some of whom were involved with the previous expedition. At every turn her snooping puts her life in danger – there are some pretty violent scenes – but she fights back tenaciously.

I read this fairly slowly, over the course of a month (alongside lots of other books); it's absorbing but in a literary style, so not as pacey or full of cliffhangers as you'd expect from a suspense novel. I got myself fairly confused over all the minor characters and the revelations about the expeditions, so made pencil notes inside the front cover to keep things straight. Setting aside the plot, which gets a bit silly towards the end, I valued this most for Smilla's self-knowledge and insights into what it's like to be a Greenland in Denmark. She's an introvert who values solitude but can be bossy when she needs to be, and she fears the loss of her people's culture. I read this straight after finishing Gretel Ehrlich's *This Cold Heaven*, a travel book about Greenland, and they ended up being an excellent pairing I'd highly recommend to anyone who wants to spend some time vicariously traveling in the far north.

### **Some favorite lines:**

“Seen from a distance, we are a father and daughter with a plethora of wealth and vitality. On closer examination, we are simply a banal tragedy spread over two generations.”

“Compassion is not a virtue in the Arctic.”

“I'm not perfect. I think more highly of snow and ice than of love. It's easier for me to be interested in mathematics than to have affection for my fellow human beings.”

“We probably all have an image of ourselves. I've always thought of myself as Ms Fierce with the big mouth.”

“I'm no heroine. I have felt something for a child. I could have put my tenacity at their disposal, if anyone



had wanted to understand his death. But there wasn't anyone. No one but me."

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### Thomas says

ἵνα ἀκμή βιβλίο που μου πῆνεσε το κεφάλι. Ο μῦθος λῆγος που το τέλεῳσα εἶναι ἐπειδὴ το θῆμα του μου τρῆβηξε το ενδιαφέρον. Ἡ ῥῆλη ἐκτῆλεση τῆς πλοκῆς ῥταν τρομερῆ βαρετῆ και οἱ χαρακτῆρες μου φῆνηκαν ῥλοι ἀνεξαίρῆτως ἀδιφόροι. Ο συγγραφέας σε πολλῆ σημεῖα υπερανῆλυε χωρῆς οὐσῆα και ἐνῆ το βιβλίο εἶναι γραμμῆνο σε πρῆτο πρῆσωπο, ῆνιωθα φορῆς πῶς μιλοῆσε ο συγγραφέας και ῆχι ῆ πρωταγωνῆστρια. Μακριῆ.

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### Virtuella says

Book Review, Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow

I've been wanting to read this book for over two decades and was glad when I finally got my hands on it. I expected great things of it, not the least because it had been recommended, back at school, by my beloved and sadly deceased teacher. I really, really wanted to like it.

I did like it for about the first hundred pages or so. The tenderness of the relationship between Smilla and the little boy, her memories of her mother, that was interesting. Then it became increasingly tedious, consisted of a lot of seemingly random actions (and then this happened and then this happened and then this happened) and towards the end I only kept going because I had come that far and thought I may as well finish it. The ending was ... unrewarding. Not because it was an open ending that explicitly rejects our desire for closure, but because the book had not evoked any desire for closure in me beyond wishing for it to come to an end. But it needs also to be said that I found nothing profound or philosophical or postmodern or whatever about that open ending. It just came across as if the author could not be bothered, or could not think of a way to round off the story better.

The larger part of the book is both boring and annoying. I saw it described as a mixture of thriller and philosophical meditation, but I found it neither thrilling nor thought-provoking. The reason it failed to thrill is that it was way too busy. Too many things happening, too many obscure plot elements (heroin smuggling by antiques dealers, Nazi collaboration, code cracking, exotic parasites, radioactivity, x-rayed mummies, meteorites that may or may not be alien life forms, a demented musician, a sado-masochist couple, gambling, murder, arson, really, he stops at nothing), too many random asides, too many characters. It was all so confusing, such a jumble of stuff that the story never had a chance to build up any real tension simply for lack of focus. What didn't help were the lengthy descriptions of, for example, the contents of cupboards or the layout of the ship, a corridor here, a door there, a light switch, move this way, move that way, duck into an alcove. There is only so much cat and mouse that is interesting to read about, then it becomes dull. I couldn't be bothered to check whether all these elements eventually form a cohesive plot, but I have a suspicion they don't – why, for example, does the mechanic join the crew on the oil rig? If he was supposed to do the diving job, why wasn't he taken on board at the same time as everyone else? Why does she bother to take the audio tape to translator and then stands awed by his ability to identify the accents but never asks about the content? What is it with those uncanny coincidences for example the jazz musician who was heard on the tape just happening to play at the casino? Why the masses of tropical fish on the ship if the parasite is explicitly said to attack marine mammals? Why do all the people who take the role of villains in the early

part of the book disappear from the scene and the whole conspiracy is then headed by someone completely different?

And where is the philosophy? In the incessant insinuation that Europeans are money and power-greedy jerks who don't understand a thing while Greenlanders are these profound people who truly understand life while they are constantly marginalised and underestimated by the arrogant Europeans? Can it get any more clichéd? Yes, we can! Everything Smilla learned at school was useless. Oh, so typical. Governments all over the world spend fortunes every day to teach their young people useless stuff. Education is pointless and bad for young people.

As I said, the relationship between Smilla and Isaiah is the attraction of the novel's opening. But later the author seems to forget Isaiah in his excitement about having thought of ridiculous plot elements like riding up and down in a dumbwaiter. Towards the end he suddenly remembers and throws in a paragraph about the boy, but by then the connection to that element has been lost beyond recovery.

Also, Smilla is a bit of a Mary Sue. The longer I read about her, the more she got on my nerves. The way she coquettishly rambles about her age, but every guy she meets fancies her - of course she is slim and pretty and always nicely dressed. The way she always just "knows" things. The special magic power she has of absolute orientation. Her unfaltering kick-ass attitude and the clever way she can always improvise a cunning weapon and anticipate her opponent's moves. The way that lack of sleep, lack of food and countless injuries don't even slow her down. The way all sorts of characters betray their sense of integrity or risk their livelihoods or even their lives in order to help her. The way even as a child she is so clever that she can get herself onto a plane to Greenland without a ticket or a passport. The way she can rattle off specialised information at the drop of a hat. The convenient father, who is on the one hand the stereotypical negative foil of a distant father but also filthy rich and endowed with all sorts of useful connections which come in ever so handy for Smilla. The way the villains just can't bring themselves to kill her. And she claims she suffers from depression, but she acts all the time like an ADHD person on energy drinks. Everyone seems endeared by her, even though she is usually rude and abrupt and insufferably smug. In typical Mary Sue style, all other characters, even though the author has clearly tried to make them colourful, are delegated to the roles of extras.

Something else that annoyed me, though this is a minor thing, was the dialogue with Urs. A person who struggles with a foreign language will use complex and specialist vocabulary in their native tongue – not simple words like yes and no, which they would easily manage in the foreign language. And yet that is what Urs does. Apparently, he doesn't know the Danish for "no" or "not bad." While Smilla, who says she is "helpless in two or three other languages" uses highly specific German vocabulary like "Strafmaßigung."

Finally, the book makes many absolute statements that are far from convincing, for example that "the important information always comes last." Gee, judging by most newspaper articles I've ever read, you'd think the opposite was the case. There's one like that in the final paragraph. "It's only what you do not understand that you can come to a conclusion about." Is this supposed to be some kind of Zen koan? But then the very last sentence ("There will be no conclusion.") still makes no sense, because there should be a conclusion, as I still don't understand what this was supposed to be all about.

I see that some reviewers, even those who didn't like it overall, mention the excellent prose. I can't agree. While there was nothing wrong with it, there also wasn't anything particularly impressive. It was just serviceable. Maybe the Danish original is full of unspeakable beauty, but I doubt it.

Overall, a huge disappointment. It might have been fair enough at half the length, but the way it went on and

on, aspiring to be epic while really not being epic at all, was a big let-down.

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## **Fabian says**

This is one peculiar read. Yes, it (kinda) defies convention (its protagonist, Smilla Jaspersen, is a breath of fresh air & the way she deals with depression & inner demons in a place that simply screams KILL YOURSELF! is both invigorating and poetic) but it is exactly its unpredictability that juxtaposes reader's feelings and reading styles... so much so that not everything matches up evenly at the end. The squirts of poetry and metaphysics in a story that is all intuition on the part of the observant main character are meager. Smilla goes everywhere by a splendid intuition which we are never truly invited to partake in.

This book absolutely transports. These places exist, the arctic is on Earth as we speak, and some populations are there, even if you never really thought about it that much. People are almost wholly forgotten in the majestic whiteness and it is no wonder that the motif of snow is used to its fullest impact here. The noirish aspect of it makes it a thriller, but it is not an easy read in any regard. So, eh, if you're up for it...

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## **Steven Godin says**

Smilla Jaspersen, a Greenlander by birth now residing in Copenhagen, late thirties, single, lonely, moody, depressive, seemingly with a grudge against everything, the sort of girl you would take on a first date, ask to be excused to go to the bathroom only you make for the exit.

But somewhere in the perpetual darkness she finds it in her heart to investigate the death of Isaiah, a small boy she befriended in her apartment block, who apparently fell of the roof whilst playing in the snow, but Smilla is an expert when it comes to cold weather conditions, and her knowledge of snow and ice makes her suspicious. As the tracks in the snow from Isaiah's feet just don't add up as to how he could have fallen to his death. Driven by a steely determination to find the truth, more for the little boy's sake than her own, she sets off on a dangerous path that will lead her to make enemies as well as allies.

Compared to other Scandinavian crime noir, this was surprisingly different in a good way, but also oddly unusual. Ingeniously plotted yes, and very atmospheric, but gets bogged down in the middle two thirds, driving around in circles not knowing where it wants to go. As central to everything that goes on, Smilla is a very well drawn heroine, and gets plunged into a web of intrigue predominated mainly by men, she stands her ground, on her own two feet, after much intimidation, unsavory sexual advances, and assault. There is definitely a bit of Lisbeth Salander in there, just minus the goth look.

Copenhagen comes alive, and Hoeg obviously knows it inside out, it plays an important, and so does the weather. As it's freezing cold, biting winds, subzero temperatures, snow and ice everywhere, and this wound only get worse later on, these conditions are just as much a hazard as the shady people being investigated, and this is where things wonder off slightly. I didn't know anything about the Danish shipping industry, I most certainly do now, as the ins and outs of the shipping business comes to the forefront, with some strange expeditions to Greenland in 1966 & 1991, which become the backbone of the story. As the story progresses, you tend to forget all about Isaiah, he is barely mentioned, the memory of him drifts away.

Isaiah's father who went on one of these voyages, also died in suspicious circumstances, and a photo taken of

him in an Arctic ice cave somewhere high up north leads Smilla to believe that there is something either buried, or hidden there, that is worth killing for to keep a secret.

I have never been a big believer when a book is said to be 'unputdownable', but the last one hundred or so pages truly were, even if the ending falls flat on its face. Taut, tense, and claustrophobic in the last third, Smilla would board a cargo ship as one of the crew bound for an unknown location heading towards Greenland, with three passengers who she thinks lie at the heart of the whole case. The voyage is shrouded in secrecy, the ship itself is ready to pick up a huge amount in weight, drugs?, weapons?, money?, but how on earth would these things even be there in the first place?, one of the most inhospitable places on the planet, covered in millions of tons of ice, what's so precious that it's worth going on an almost suicide mission for?, and why did a small child have to die?

This never really read as a 'who-done-it', more asks the question why?. It's a bit messy in places, and probably too clever for its own good, but as a piece of crime/mystery writing it works, and is a good alternative to this type of genre. But the ending!...frustrating to say the least, it's a case of the journey being far greater than its destination.

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### **Larissa says**

It took me two months to finish this book and not until the last three weeks and 150 pages of that endeavor did I realize that it is actually quite terrible. It's been quite awhile since I've felt so cheated, nay--betrayed--by a novel. Because when you begin this book it is primarily concerned with the slow unfolding of character. You are tied to the titular Miss Smilla and her cynical absolutist world view. It doesn't take long to figure out that she has no interest in providing you with a fair, unbiased (or just complete) view of herself and the situation you find her in. But she is compelling and her environment and past is compelling, even if you're only getting bits and pieces of it pasted together out of order. It's the voice that keeps us interested--the 'mystery' of how Smilla's young neighbor fell off a roof is a secondary concern.

But Hoeg can't seem to let go of his who-done-it instinct and begins dragging us through a web of circumstantial, convoluted plot points, bound and determined to make one tragic event resonate all the more so for the gigantic Space Conspiracy that he has attached to it for no good reason.

I will be writing Peter Hoeg a long, bitterly-worded letter as soon as I have the Danish to do so. It's a goal.

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### **Carolina says**

Smilla is, I think, my hands-down favourite fictional character. Which makes it easy for me to keep returning to this book. It's a translation from Danish (by Tiina Nunnally) and beautiful and technical and never sentimental, and it touches on issues I find particularly interesting such as European culture versus aboriginal culture (in this case Danish vs. Greenlandic) and the related issues of language and identity. Peter Hoeg has a mind that is both scientific and whimsical and I find that particular combination particularly pleasurable as a reader and as a writer. Also, if you're in a position to listen to audio books, the unabridged reading by Alyssa Bresnahan is amazing. And a good idea if you want to know how to pronounce the Danish and Greenlandic

words properly.

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### **Michael says**

This is an interesting and somewhat convoluted thriller, whose laconic prose and narrative voice kept me interested even when the pacing (which is a bit uneven) was a little off. It's really that narrative voice that raises this a notch above your standard genre thriller, although the end did partake somewhat disappointingly in convention.

Overall, another good Frozen Fiction read.

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### **Paul Bryant says**

Miss Smilla and her cast of characters were so quirky that after 100 pages I found all this quirk over the front of my shirt, all over the dining table (well, I call it a dining table) and stuck between the keys on my keyboard. Had to get it out with a Swiss Army knife, once it had dried. Sent a sample off to the lab and the results came back "two parts David Lynch, three parts frankly unbelievable heroine, three parts uninvolved plot which moves at the speed of an exhausted glacier". As I thought.

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### **Jan-Maat says**

Smilla's Sense of Snow wasn't what I was expecting. It was not so bad a book that I could fairly say that I was disappointed but I wasn't left satisfied after the reading experience either.

First off the hero of the story is a half Greenlander who thinks back on her Greenland heritage. Her knowledge of snow and ice, acquired in childhood, are important to the plot, but this is a book written by a Dane. Once we get into the exploration of issues around colonialism then it starts to feel a little crass that the Danes seize their country, undermine their way of life and then finally appropriate them via literary culture. I found it uncomfortable to read a Dane writing that the Greenlandic way of life has to be lived to be understood, this is like the man from Crete declaring that all Cretans are liars. Here the author is declaring to his readers that he is going to explain to us something he can't understand - excellent. Still there aren't that many Greenlanders about so no doubt you can get away with it.

Some readers have complained that the boat layout doesn't make any sense, others are annoyed at the inaccurate description of the pistol. Personally I'm mystified by the chef using a loaf of bread as weapon, a single blow of which was apparently enough to knock one of the villains unconscious for an indeterminate length of time. It doesn't matter how fresh out the oven it was - that kind of knockout blow can't be done by bread alone.

Another is the use of the boat to smuggle drugs. OK the lead villains are evil mad scientists. And if you are an evil mad scientist I'm sure it's quite reasonable to build up the money you need to do evil mad science by getting involved in the drugs trade and developing new super opiates as the evil mad scientists do in his novel. Fair enough, everybody needs to earn their daily bread. But surely when you are undertaking a scientific mission, even an evil and mad scientific mission to a giant meteor (which may or may not be

alive), you don't endanger the science by trying to smuggle illegal drugs on the boat at the same time or alert the potential suspicions of the authorities by crewing the boat almost entirely with people who have been involved in the drugs trade, particularly when the ambition (besides making money) of one of the lead evil mad scientists is to win scientific renown. I'm no scientist but I have this curious suspicion that if you want to win Nobel prizes and dine in close proximity to Scandinavian royalty it's best not to be too obviously associated with the illegal drugs trade. You need some degree of compartmentalism here.

Then there are a whole bunch of issues because the author has enough material here for two or three books each three hundred pages long but decided instead to stuff them all into one five hundred page novel. This means there is too much plot (like *The Northern Light* in that respect but better written) and it's awkwardly forced together. In a detective thriller some red herrings and dead ends are both traditional and expected. Authors! In this genre there is no need to tie everything up together!

In this case it makes things worse with far too much explanation shoved into the last fifty pages. Had parts of the explanation been revealed two or three hundred pages earlier the menace of that revelation would have hung on the conscience of the reader rather than flopping at their feet like a dying fish in the race to finish the book.

There were things I liked such as the whole business of the West Greenlanders trekking over the ice to the meteor. But having somebody able to track one of them down to, and have the security clearance to gain access to, the US military base at Thule but not have the clearance to do a sound recording of one of the trek survivors in an office or a small meeting room but instead in the restaurant shortly before a well-known Jazz musician played while luckily the one man in the whole of Copenhagen who understood West Greenlandish and was able to transcribe and translate the contents of the recording was at the same time such a great Jazz fan and was thus able to pin point when the trek occurred seriously overstretched my limited credulity.

All of these thoughts attracted the stillborn ghosts of potential alternatives of this novel to haunt me.

In one a woman from Greenland tries to track down who ever might be responsible for the death of the young Greenland boy who leaps off the roof of the building. Unfortunately being a Greenlander in Denmark she suffering from cultural alienation and confusion and since both she and the victim are Greenlanders neither are taken seriously by the authorities. This would be a slightly pessimistic novel best appreciated mid-hibernation, under the duvet, with bottles of strong liquor.

Alternatively a woman with mixed Greenland heritage has an almost instinctual feeling for snow and ice that help her solve all kinds of crimes that occur in winter, rather like those detectives who only solve country house murders or the murders of Oxford academics.

Or perhaps a barely plausible mixture of mad and evil scientists race to find a mysterious meteor that has landed on the ice near Greenland. The meteor may be radioactive, alive or contain non-carbon based life and is the subject of fierce speculation as they draw nearer across the frozen wastes of the far north.

However I'm absolutely certain that I would never advise the inclusion of all these elements into a single five hundred page novel (unless maybe it was due to be written by Cervantes and edited by Lawrence Sterne).

Having said all that, and despite (and perhaps in part because of) the author's relentless need to keep up the tension by having a person enter a room unexpectedly with or without a gun just when the hero is on the brink of a crucial discovery, it is a page turner. Elements of the setting are unusual and it does, just about,

avoid dragging the Nazis and hidden gold into the story, so it is not all bad.

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## **Josh says**

After an initially over-enthusiastic 5 stars (which prompted consternation from some parties!) and then a too-sober 3 stars, I'm settling on four stars for this intelligent, brooding, minutely researched, acutely observed thriller. I think I wanted to give it five stars for two reasons: I read some negative reviews on this very webpage, and, finding them idiotic, wanted to vindicate this novel. I also cannot get out of my head the image of the Swiss German cook Urs using a freshly baked, burning-hot loaf of bread as a weapon: amazing!

Smilla is the protagonist: half-Danish, half-Greenlandic, slipping through the cracks between both identities, as she also slips through the cracks of her academic, professional and social life. She has a very keen perception and, through the first-person voice, the narrative has this hypnotizing pattern of reporting the events of the story, stepping immediately back from a particular event and moving inward to Smilla's abstract or general reflection, and then moving back to the action of the story. It is a cycle you can see playing out page after page, and it is for the most part engrossing.

As the plot unfolds and new information comes in, one knows more and more about Smilla as a person, but mysteriously less and less about how she will act in the future. The more one knows about her life and her way of thinking, the less one can predict what she will do and why she will do it. In the end even she herself doesn't seem to know! This epistemological paradox seems to be one of the major lessons of the book: people that try to instrumentalize and exploit what they know inevitably do terrible things; people like Smilla who respect the limits of their knowledge. . . well, they end up being the victims of those other people.

Brilliantly detailed writing on Copenhagen, on corporate capital, ships and navigation, glaciology, parasitology, non-organic life: there is a love for the most technical aspects of a system of knowledge in the face of the increasing inability of such systems to remain pure. Much more could be said if I'd written this review four months ago! Highly recommended.

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## **El says**

This was the third book I took with me for the Second Annual Cat-Sitting event at my brother's place. He has the unfortunate luck of having his birthday in the middle of August, the hottest time of the year, and he goes off to have adventures with his lady-friend, giving me the opportunity to sit in his very hot house that does not have air conditioning to keep an eye on his cats, take advantage of his streaming Netflix, and read until my eyes bleed.

Last year one of the books I took with me was the absolutely gorgeous Canadian book, *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* by Wayne Johnston. That was a good book to read because it was about Newfoundland and they have snow in Newfoundland. You know who doesn't have snow in the middle of August? My brother's place in Pittsburgh. So it was nice to read about snow last year when I was otherwise dying from heatstroke.

This year I brought along this book, not because it was about snow (at least not intentionally), but because it's been on my bookshelf for-freaking-ever and I don't even know why I haven't read it already. The cover

claims it was the Best Book of the Year. This book came out in the early 90s, around the time I was probably still busy reading V.C. Andrews and Anne Rice's vampire books with all the same level of interest and anticipation.

The story starts with a six-year-old boy who dies after a fall from the top of the apartment building where he lived. Smilla has known the boy for a while as she also lives in the apartment building and sort of befriends the tyke as his own mother is not fit to be a mother. The police are all like "Accident!" but Smilla is all like "Bullshit!" because there's nothing about the scene that makes it look like this kid died from an accident.

It's okay, though, Smilla will figure it out.

This was a highly readable and interesting book, and now I'm going to piss everyone off by comparing Smilla to another female protagonist that I have previously said I couldn't fucking stand: Lisbeth Salander.

Yes, *that* Lisbeth that you all know and love from the Millennium Trilogy. The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo Who Played With Fire While Kicking the Hornets' Nest girl.

Guess what, everyone - Peter Høeg wrote about Lisbeth before she was Lisbeth. And (gasp) he did it *better*. This is all a matter of opinion, of course, but let me share my opinion since you're here.

Smilla is just as stand-offish and strange and socially awkward as Lisbeth. What's different in the way Høeg wrote Smilla compared to how Larsson wrote Lisbeth is I feel Høeg actually respected Smilla. He wrote a character with an entire backstory that felt *believable*, and therefore her actions in her late 30s felt more believable as well. Høeg appears to actually care about Smilla in a way that I never felt Larsson felt for Lisbeth - in that case, Lisbeth was a vehicle for the author's fantasy of what a woman would be: tough, brilliant, and hot.

Smilla is all of those things as well (oh, and she's more fashionable, not that that means anything, just throwing it out there), except it didn't feel like Høeg was drooling all over her every time he put her on the page. She felt separate from the author, able to do what she wanted, rather than what the author wanted her to do (to him). It felt more natural. Smilla has flaws in ways Larsson never allowed Lisbeth to have flaws, and you know what it is about flaws in a character that is important? It makes the *real*.

All that being said, there are other similarities between the Millennial books and this one, there's this whole thriller aspect. I found even that more readable here than those other books which I read out of obligation, really, rather than any real desire to read them. I had a desire to finish this one.

I found myself frustrated in some of the same ways - oh, here's Smilla to save the day! Oh, with just a look she can make some bad man cower and spill all the secrets. I mean, I'm told I have a pretty withering look myself sometimes, but I'm not even as good as Smilla or Lisbeth. They are in a class of their own.

Høeg is a surprisingly knowledgeable writer. If you look up his history, he's pretty much done it all: Sailor, ballet dancer, actor, and he's dabbled in fencing and mountaineering. And now he's a writer. It's actually sort of hot, being all Danish and accomplished like that. It's sort of like when we all found out that hot Aragorn actor can also write poetry, is a photographer, musician, and a painter, and oh yeah, also speaks like fifteen languages.

Aragorn is also Danish. For the love of god, Danes, what is in your drinking water? Why do your men-folk even bother putting on clothes?



Høeg uses his past experience as a sailor in this book and it's not even too-Melville-ian for my taste. There's a lot of talk about ice and snow and ships and more ice and more snow, and instead of it being a drag to read it was like I was reading about what ice and snow must be like, as if I have never experienced either before. That's a pretty talented writer, to make me feel like I'm new to the whole ice and snow thing.

There were passages in this book that knocked my socks off. I made several status updates here and probably alienated all of my friends because there were so many. Thanks for sticking with me, team. They really were just so, so good.

There was also this sex scene that... I can't even.

I can't give this a full five stars because I don't know why, but I thought this was a pretty solid read. I was a bit hesitant at first - oh, god, another guy writing from a woman's perspective, how awful will this be. It turned out to not be as bad as I was expecting. It wasn't perfect, but way better than that Larsson guy.

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