



White Crocodile

K.T. Medina

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One of *Booklist's* Best Crime Novels of the Year

Tess Hardy thought she had put Luke, her violent ex-husband, firmly in her past. Then he calls from Cambodia, where he is working as a mine-clearer, and there's something in his voice she hasn't heard before: Fear. Two weeks later, he's dead.

Against her better judgment, Tess is drawn to Cambodia and to the killing fields. Keeping her relationship to Luke a closely guarded secret, Tess joins his team of mine clearers, who are shaken to the core by Luke's sudden death. Even in their grief, the group remains a tightly knit and tightly wound community in which almost everyone has something to hide.

At the same time, the circle of death begins to expand. Teenage mothers are disappearing from villages around the minefields, while others are being found mutilated and murdered, their babies abandoned.

Everywhere there are whispers about the White Crocodile, a mythical beast that brings death to all who meet it. Caught in a web of secrets and lies, Tess must unravel the truth, and quickly. The crocodile is watching, and Tess may be its next victim.

Combining the technical expertise of military suspense with a richly drawn sense of place, *White Crocodile* forges new ground in the thriller genre. Medina's internationally acclaimed debut announces the arrival of a prodigiously talented novelist whom readers will be discussing for years to come.

White Crocodile Details

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From Reader Review White Crocodile for online ebook

Susan says

Tess Hardy is an ex army combat engineer – not the sort of woman you would imagine would be a victim of domestic violence. However, she was, and now her ex husband, Luke, is working for the Mine Clearance Trust (MCT) in Cambodia. When he contacts her, she is surprised to hear he sounds frightened and, when he is suddenly killed while clearing mines, she is both confused and shocked. Luke was the most controlled and careful man she ever knew – not the type to make a careless mistake. With conflicted feelings, Tess decides to travel to Cambodia and investigate how and why he died.

Within a short time of joining the charity, Tess witnesses another accident at the White Crocodile minefield where Luke was killed. This time, Johnny, another member of the team, is terribly injured. In Cambodia, people place a white cloth with a picture of a crocodile outside their homes when someone dies and the White Crocodile minefield has become both a place of death and of myth. However, looking beneath the local myths and superstitions is not always easy. The local Cambodian's believe that when a person loses part of their body, they also lose part of their mind. Yet, with a countryside literally filled with mines - halting people from farming the land - and so many people injured, the tragedy and poverty seems overwhelming. Soon, Tess realises that things are not right at the MCT, but digging too deep can be dangerous – whether clearing minefields or asking too many questions...

As Tess investigates Luke's death and Johnny's accident, she becomes aware that many young women have disappeared. Then, a world away, a young girl is murdered in Manchester. This fast paced novel tackles some very difficult and thought provoking issues, but never loses its ability to be, above all, an interesting and entertaining novel. With an exotic location, damaged and flawed characters, a well plotted storyline and, above all, an excellent heroine in Tess, this is a great thriller.

Paromjit says

K.T. Medina has written a gutwrenching crime thriller for her debut. Her atmospheric pictures of Cambodia evoke a haunted country that is trying to recover from the horrors of its past. There is a second minor strand to the book which links what is happening in Cambodia with the discovery of a murdered woman found in Manchester. The Manchester investigation is headed by the conscientious DI Andy Wessex, who follows the trail to a brothel.

Tess Hardy is working to rid the land mines that are everywhere in the country leading to horrific level of deaths and injuries. She is working for a charity, MCT, because her abusive ex husband, Luke, has been killed in what are suspicious circumstances. She wants to know what is going on, and there are strange disappearances of women, the gruesome murders of single mothers and a exploding mine that maims Johnny, who is also with MCT. There are whispers of the white crocodile being responsible, this ties in with local folklore and legend. She is aided by the troubled Alex in her investigations. It is a dangerous trail she is following and the body count rises. Evidence is uncovered that some men in the organisation are engaged in sex with minors, abusing young women and children. It is a murky and morally comprised world. Answers come, but not without a heavy cost. There is a unexpected angle that comes out of the blue.

Medina has made a superb debut. She is remarkably knowledgeable about the world she writes about. A bone chilling menacing atmosphere pervades the story. The novel is both well structured and plotted. The fast paced narrative keeps the reader engaged to the explosive end. I loved the character of Tess Hardy and I hope we have not heard the last from her. A crime thriller to read and savour.

Ruthie says

3.5 rating

This novel could have been so good. It just needed a better editor. The story is a mystery set in the background of mine-clearing in Cambodia. The problem is that it also involves sex trafficking, spousal abuse, child abuse, murder, a mythical creature, police corruption, NGO corruption, government corruption and more. Too many leave little room for any of the issues to be explored properly or for the story to flow. I wish the author had focused on fewer issues and given us more character development. I found the ending rushed and trite. That being said, the book was interesting and raised topics I knew little about, and now can't stop thinking about!

Bill says

This is the first novel by Medina and it's a really great thriller, and she is a fine writer.

The main character Tess goes to Cambodia to find out what happened to her estranged husband who was killed while clearing mines that the Khmer Rouge had left behind. Indeed she herself is a mine clearer, so she goes there on the pretext of doing work there, as nobody knows that she is trying to find out what happened to her husband.

This is one of the most urgent page turners I have ever read, with constantly building suspense and an amazing out of nowhere ending. I read the whole book in one sitting. Some of the violence is quite graphic and sexual trafficking of women is part of the story as well, so it can be kind of upsetting at times. But all in all, it's a great book and I can't wait for her second one.

Regina Foo says

Is it just me? I feel bored when reading this book.

Liz Barnsley says

An absolutely thrilling yet quietly emotional read can be found within the pages of “White Crocodile” a novel that, for me, gave new life to the thriller and mystery genre and at the same time gave me plenty to think about – although the thinking came later, while you are immersed into the pages you won’t look up for anything...

One of the best books I've read recently for putting you right on the spot, the sense of place is expressive, the living conditions, the people, the danger they face everyday – the beauty of the prose puts you right there with them every step of the way. Seen through the eyes of main protagonist Tess Hardy – a strong, intelligent yet haunted woman who travels to the country seeking answers about the death of her ex-husband, the subtle ways the author manages to get under your skin make the book memorable and intelligent – this one will stay with you for a long time.

Add to that the fact that the mystery element is well plotted and brilliantly flowing in a way that captures the imagination and keeps you gripped throughout, the supporting cast of characters are all as well drawn and integral to the story as Tess is herself and you really do have a most amazing read. There are some emotive and terrifying issues running through the narrative, all handled in an extremely realistic and sympathetic way and overall this is without doubt one of the best debuts of the year and deserves a lot of attention. I have no hesitation in highly recommending it to any reader, anywhere.

Christine says

White Crocodile is the debut crime novel from K. T. Medina. K. T. Medina now writes as Kate Medina. The majority of the book is set in Cambodia, which appealed to me hugely. My knowledge of Cambodia and its dark history are mostly based on what I've heard in the media. I am aware of the Cambodian Killing Fields.

This story starts with Tess Hardy, a tough woman working a dangerous job. Tess is a professional land mine clearer, with a background in the armed forces. She moves to Cambodia to work with a specialised charity dedicated to clearing hidden land mines, The Mines Clearance Trust. The country is plagued with them, causing mass life loss and injury every year. Tess is still processing the death of her husband. Luke was abusive towards her, over the course of their relationship. She is emotionally raw and hurting from this. Soon Tess is caught up in the mystery of the disappearing young Cambodian mothers, the unexplained accidents happening to mine clearance professionals and the myth of the white crocodile. Fear and suspicion is everywhere. Tess is determined to find answers, whatever the cost.

This is a clever debut; atmospheric and thought-provoking. It really lifts the lid on Cambodia and the horror of land mines. It is an education, in the terrifying process of making land mines safe. We see two sides to the Western ex-pat community. We see the work of the charity, the benevolence and the compassion. At the same time, there is the revolting ugly side, the sexual exploitation of children and the prostitution of Cambodian women. Morality has become blurred. The very same people both helping and exploiting, in a strange juxtaposition. Corruption is everywhere. We see poverty. The locals live in very basic conditions compared to the wealth of the Western ex-pat foreigners. We feel the unbearable heat. This feels like a very different culture, to the West, to England.

The supernatural aspect of the novel was strong. I was dazzled by the myth of the white crocodile. The white crocodile represents death to the Cambodians. It is fear. It is the devil. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy, as superstitions become reality.

White Crocodile is an excellent thriller, with a supernatural flavour. Dark. Fast paced. Completely relevant. Intelligent. It is the kind of novel you read and then you research. Cambodia is brought to vivid life, on the written page. Recommended.

Rayna says

"White Crocodile," by K.T. Medina seemed like a missed opportunity to this reader. Set in the exotic location of modern day Cambodia, this novel tackles the some heavy issues including extreme poverty, inadequate medical facilities, and the continued victimization of civilians due to past war. All of these problems set the scene for a unique, who done it, type story. So, why was this reader ultimately disappointed? I'll tell you why.

In the, "White Crocodile," the main character, Tess, finds herself drawn to the strange and primitive land of Cambodia in order to locate answers regarding her ex-husband, Luke's, death. Upon arrival, she is informed he was instantly killed during an accident while working to clear explosive mines from a forgotten battlefield. However, Tess has a hard time accepting this explanation. It is revealed that prior to his death Luke contacted her with concerns for his safety. Here enters the plot line of the White Crocodile, and simultaneously what this reader found to be a missed opportunity.

The tale of the, "White Crocodile," is a superstition created by the native people of Cambodia to explain the continued disappearance, mutilation, and often murder of many local young women. It is said the White Crocodile roams the villages at night stealing and killing women as it pleases. Unfortunately, that is all that is really said. This reader kept waiting for the character, Tess, to have some actual one on one conversation with the, "villagers," about the White Crocodile myth. I wanted to hear more about the beast in, "the bush." I wanted to feel the tension alluded too, but never really examined by the author. Basically, I was looking for a little mystique mixed with my mystery. Instead, I got a basic, "who done it," story rather than the, "what did it," paranoia I was craving.

Don't get me wrong the, "White Crocodile," by K.T. Medina was still an enjoyable read with a fairly good twist at the end. Maybe I was just looking for my twist to be more exotic than a Cambodian setting.

Tripfiction says

Novel set in Battambang, Cambodia (mine all mine...)

White Crocodile is a tense, page-turning, and extremely well written debut thriller from K T Medina. It is set primarily in Battambang (North Western Cambodia, near the Thai border...), with flashes to Manchester. Battambang, now 'in real life' an attractive and significantly tourist town with French colonial architecture, was one of the centres of fighting during the time of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. The area around the town features well marked mine fields – and tourists nowadays are instructed not to wander off clearly defined paths... The problem, of course, is much more serious for Cambodians than it is for tourists – whole swathes of what was prime agricultural land are still off limits and deprivation and hunger are the norm for many across the country. Mine clearing charities are in operation, and the story centres around one of these.

Luke, from England, leaves his estranged wife Tess behind (she left him because of domestic violence – sensitively portrayed) and heads off to work for MCT – Mine Clearance Trust. Tess is told he has been killed, and travels to Cambodia to try and establish what actually happened. The White Crocodile is a character from ancient mythology foretelling death – still believed in by many Cambodians today. There is a series of abductions and murders in the minefield where MCT is working – and the White Crocodile is

blamed by the Cambodians workers, and also by some of the Westerners. Fear is rampant.

At the same time, and in parallel chapters, Manchester detectives are investigating the murder of a Cambodian girl and the trafficking of others into the sex trade in the area. Not surprisingly the two stories come together...The denouement is thrilling and well worked.

White Crocodile works particularly well because of the experience of K T Medina, and her ability to describe so convincingly the horror of mines and the damage they can do to the human body. One especially poignant piece describes how a young girl is lured into picking up a 'butterfly mine' – so called because of its irresistibly pretty colours that lead to carnage when disturbed. Medina's ability comes from real life - she spent time as a Troop Commander in a TA regiment of the Royal Engineers, and then worked as a Managing Editor at Jane's Information Group. Part of her role at Jane's involved being with mine clearing groups in both the Middle East and Battambang where she advised on helping deal with complex mines. The authenticity comes shining through... it is insightful but rarely sentimental.

Many 'causes' are covered in White Crocodile. I've already mentioned domestic violence, and how accurate those descriptions are (my counsellor friends tell me..). But there is also the largely ignored plight of many Cambodians, and the issue of sex trafficking. Plus one of the key characters is a Croatian who suffered greatly in the war with Serbia, and still carries the mental wounds. But – and it's very clever the way Medina handles this – you do not feel you are being preached at in any way. Above all else White Crocodile is a great and exciting 'whodunit'.

Well worth reading.

Pat says

This was a very good read - the kind where it's hard to put down. Tess Hardy is a mine clearer and she receives a disturbing call from her ex-husband who is clearing mines in Cambodia. Shortly after his call, Tess learns he was killed by a mine explosion and she decides to go to Cambodia to work out the mysteries surrounding his death. From there, the reader is taken on a journey of the world of mine clearance as well as the exotic world of Cambodia. An excellent first novel and sadly this is not available in the United States in either paper book form or ebook (what's up with that?). It's British so you have to go to the source to get a copy (thank the Internet Gods for international shopping). Highly recommend.

Paul says

Reading the other reviews of this book I wonder if I read something else. The story was good, it would have been great in more capable hands. The dialogue and interaction between Tess and Alex, were horrible, stilted, and bring. No one behaves like this. It took forever for the story to get to the point, and it was very difficult to like anyone in the book. A great story wasted by bad writing.

W. Scott says

A few years ago, I fell out of a tree; about six or seven meters. In the nano-second I had in which to react, I

had the presence of mind to twist my body so that I landed on my side, not on my head [which would have probably killed me] or on to my back [because a broken spine would mean a wheelchair for life]. I smashed my right shoulder so badly that even today I have limited use of my right arm. The surgeons couldn't put the damaged bones and tissue back together but thanks to our fantastic NHS, they gave me a new steel joint and shoulder plate. But the muscle has gone.

This novel is divided into chapter headings in terms of days: DAY 1; DAY 2 &tc up to and including DAY 8. It is about many things but early on, on DAY 2 someone has his leg blown off by a concealed anti-personnel land-mine. The author, K T Medina doesn't make much of the incident but the level of pain visceral, physical and mental that he must have suffered can only be imagined.

On DAY 5 he is back home, 'screwing Keav', his live-in private prostitute.

Let me tell you, I couldn't so much as butter a slice of toast on the third day after smashing my shoulder.

Big mistake buying this. Its her debut novel and has reviews to die for on Amazon and by and large I do trust the Amazon reviewers but reading it, I felt I had landed on another planet. Badly written and poorly edited . . . was it edited? . . . it has no redeeming features. At times it feels like a creative writing test to see how many plot-holes you can cram into one book. And it is tell, tell, tell; it's like that bloody Place Called Winter I forced down over Christmas, don't they teach show not tell at these creative writing courses? The subject matter is mine-clearance in contemporary Cambodia, very laudable and quite commendable that she can skilfully bring this to our attention without being morbid or overly pessimistic about the awful situation there. Most reviewers mention this and I am sure that Ms Medina and her publishers and Agents would make the case that the subject matter is deserving of our attention, but she has decided it isn't dismal enough. She introduces other harrowing miseries; sex trafficking; extreme child cruelty; murder; domestic abuse; corruption; forced prostitution; Bosnia; wretched third-world orphanages. No barrel is left unscraped. And all this is served up to entertain us?

There is clearly a constituency for misery-fiction but I am not amongst them.

There is a school of thought that we need to read about these horrors so that as individuals, we can process the terrors of the world: the beheadings; the crucifixions; people being burned alive in cages; the fear, the dismay at man's cruelty to man. The only way we can sleep at night is by processing them in crime fiction or a thriller like White Crocodile or a cinema experience like The Revenant.

But she employs such monumental effort for so little return.

Annet says

Really good, solid and intriguing thriller, I could not put it down! The story features mine-clearer Tess going to Cambodja to investigate the truth about her ex-husband's death there and to do her job clearing mines. She discovers that young local girls are going missing. Some are found later, mutilated and murdered, their babies abandoned. The locals are superstitious about the 'White Crocodile', a mythical creature that brings death to all who meet it....I read in the review of Independent (link below) that the myth of the white crocodile is still believed in Cambodia today. The story is dark, it's scary, atmospheric, the Cambodian scenery is unusual, and I did not see the ending coming until the very last pages. Great read, this writer is interesting! Say 4.2 rating. Recommended, worthwhile.

Note, love the cover, great black & white artwork. Simple, beautiful and effective.

Review of The Independent

Raven says

Sometimes, when you read a surfeit of the same genre, books can be quickly put aside, as all too often they begin to repeat the same old tired motifs, and conceits, of crime writing. Sometimes, however, something fresh, new, original and exciting awaits you, and I'm delighted to say that *White Crocodile* is one such book. Using the backdrop of Battambang in Cambodia, Medina has not only succeeded in constructing a story that adheres to all the tenets of a gripping crime thriller, but also skilfully manipulates this chosen location to integrate the attendant issues of this country still recovering from the ravages of war...

Penned by debut author, K.T. Medina, this book completely defied my expectations in terms of content and the execution of the story. With an incredibly accomplished prose style, that carried the story along beautifully, I felt so closely involved and intimately acquainted with the characters throughout this powerful and moving tale. Tess Hardy is a troubled woman, not only differentiated by her gender in the masculine environment she works in as a mine clearance expert, but also having come out the other side of an abusive relationship- a relationship that is powerfully rendered within the book. As Tess reconciles herself to the breakdown of this relationship, a strange phone call from Luke (her husband), mine clearing in Cambodia, followed swiftly by his death, takes Tess to this strange and dangerous environment. As the link between Luke's death and a series of young women's murders in Battambang becomes more evident, Tess finds herself embroiled in not only the day-to-day dangers of her job, in a community steeped in folkloric suspicion, but dark secrets with their roots back in England. Despite the clear and concise drawing of the other characters in the book, it is Tess that is the central lynchpin of the whole story, and she exudes a fascinating combination of emotional strength and weakness throughout. Her utter professionalism as a mine clearer is never in question, holding her own among her male counterparts, but there is a delicious fragility to her at times, that positively impacts on the reader, as she delves deeper into the mystery of the murders, and how the perpetrator of these could be dwelling closer to home than she thinks. As we follow her progress from victim, to defender of these women singled out for death, and finds herself in danger, the reader is utterly immersed in her story, and the mental and emotional strength she attains along the way.

Although, my personal knowledge of Cambodia, has only been accrued through film representations and other fictional books, I felt that the setting, influenced by the author's own personal experience of the region, was perfect in its rendition. The suffocating heat, the strange belief systems, the heartbreaking visualisations of mine victims, and the prejudices experienced by women within this community, came powerfully to the fore. I was genuinely moved by the plight of the local people, carving out some kind of existence, beleaguered by poverty due to the unstable nature of their surrounding environment- an environment whose description Medina carefully balances between both the good and the bad aspects, that impact on the lives of its inhabitants.

I was genuinely impressed by the scope of this crime read, and in common with the best crime writing, I felt that *White Crocodile* went beyond such a simple label. Packed with colourful description, weighty issues, and an inherent sensitivity to the particular social and economic problems of this region of Cambodia, Medina has achieved something quite special, and more importantly, refreshingly different. A remarkable debut.

Anette says

Auf dem Klappentext steht "Das weisse Krokodil ist Dein Richter. Das weisse Krokodil ist Dein Schicksal.

Das weisse Krokodil ist Dein Tod."

Das las sich schon mal sehr vielversprechend ... es sollte ein packender Thriller sein. Dabei dreht es sich um die Engländerin Tess, die sich von ihrem Ehemann getrennt hat. Der nun bei einem Minenräumeinsatz in Kambodscha stirbt. Tess glaubt nicht an einen Unfall, und fährt selbst nach Kambodscha. Da sie auch ausgebildete Minensucherin und -räumerin ist, kommt sie bei den gleichen Einsatztrupp unter. Und muss gleich am ersten Einsatztag mit ansehen, wie ihr zugeteilter Kollege unter dubiosen Umständen durch eine Landmine zerfetzt wird. So weit, so spannend. Das weisse Krokodil des Titels ist eine Zeichnung, ein Symbol, vor dem die Einheimischen und sukzessive auch die europäischen Minenräumer immer mehr Angst haben. Denn es symbolisiert den Tod ... Parallel zu den Geschehnissen in Kambodscha wird in England die Leiche einer jungen Frau gefunden, der zuständige Kommissar entdeckt bei seiner Mördersuche irgendwann dann den Zusammenhang mit Kambodscha - wo seit einigen Monaten junge Frauen verschwinden. Oder brutal ermordet werden. Tess muss sich also mit abergläubischen Einheimischen, durchdrehenden europäischen Kollegen vor Ort (entweder traumatisiert, oder pädophil, oder beides ...) sowie diversen Verschwörungstheorien herumschlagen. Klingt ja soweit recht spannend - und man merkt, dass die Autorin selbst beim Militär und auf den Minenfeldern Kambodschas war.

Nur: die vielen genauesten Bezeichnungen und Beschreibungen der verschiedenen Waffen- und Minentypen, bis ins letzte Detail, halten die Story doch ziemlich auf. Außerdem handelt Tess häufig nicht nachvollziehbar, man kann sich nicht mit ihr identifizieren. Letztendlich war es dann beim Lesen ehrlich gesagt ziemlich egal, ob sie den Mörder findet, wer das ist, ob jemand vom Team überlebt (und nein, ich spoilere nie, deswegen hier auch nicht mehr zum Inhalt). So zogen sich die gut 400 Seiten ziemlich zahnlos dahin - im Gegensatz zum titelgebenden weissen Krokodil, das im Buch ordentlich Opfer forderte!

Fazit: 3 von 5 möglichen Sternen. Interessantes Thema, aber für einen Thriller zu langatmig.
