

Title: The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair That Changed America

Author: Erik Larson

Genre: True Crime/Biography

By: Shikha Soni

The Devil in the White City: A Review

The Devil in the White City by Erik Larson tells the story of two contrasting forces that tell the story of Chicago in the 1890s. As Chicago developed a steady population (2nd largest in the country at that time in fact), they wanted to prove their worth as a city of high-class. As a result, Congress decided to hold the 1893 World Fair in Chicago which was led by architect Daniel H. Burnham. At the same time, H. H. Holmes, a doctor, is going on a “killing spree” throughout Chicago, causing much damage to its reputation. The simultaneous narratives of Burnham's visionary endeavor and Holmes' crimes serve as a gripping juxtaposition that reveals the contrasting forces at play during this pivotal moment in Chicago's history.

One of the first thoughts I had on this book was how there was an interesting stylistic choice of incorporating the identity of the murderer in the first pages of the book. Typically, it is revealed by the author as to provide a twist but as I read on I realized how important it was in the development of the plot. For example, Larson writes “The secrets of Holme’s castle eventually did come to light, but only because of the persistence of a lone detective from a far-off city, grieving his own terrible loss.” Without the identity of the murderer, we couldn’t have gotten various sentences describing his crime and his capture in such detail. Although the style of Erik Larson led to an immense tension, just as us readers would get excited about what is going to happen the book changes to its subplot to follow the other story which oftentimes got confusing and led me having to reread some parts in order to gain an understanding of it. However, Erik Larson’s style of writing fits very well with the tone of this book because it often contributes to the main contrast between the two main characters. For example, “The white city had drawn men in and protected them; the black city now welcomed them back, on the eve of winter, with filth, starvation, and violence.”

Overall, I found this book quite entertaining and would rate it a 3.9 stars in my opinion. This book impressed me in many ways but at times I would find myself getting bored easily and although it could be because this isn’t my typical read, I still enjoyed reading about both characters. I would recommend this book to people interested in the historical context of America rather than people interested in true crime books. Additionally, the author's ability to vividly depict the historical setting of America captivated me throughout the story. Despite the occasional moments of boredom, the intriguing development of both characters kept me

invested, and their journeys unfolded in a compelling manner. Overall, this book offers a fascinating blend of history and storytelling.