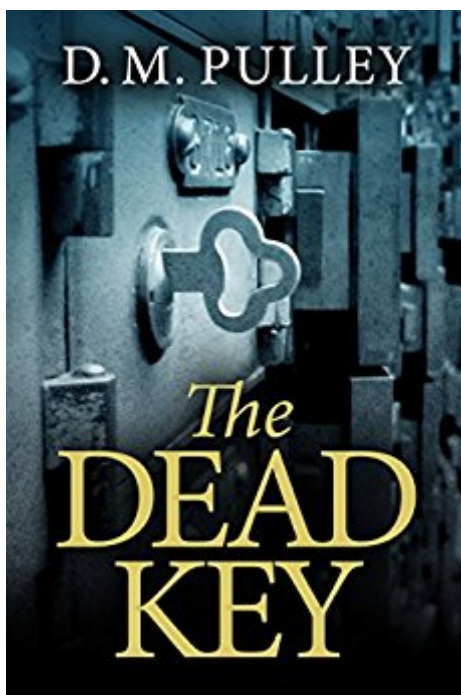


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The Dead Key



Synopsis

2014 Winner • Breakthrough Novel Award • Grand Prize and Mystery & Thriller Fiction Winner
In 1998, and for years the old First Bank of Cleveland has sat abandoned, perfectly preserved, its secrets only speculated on by the outside world. Twenty years before, amid strange staff disappearances and allegations of fraud, panicked investors sold Cleveland's largest bank in the middle of the night, locking out customers and employees, and thwarting a looming federal investigation. In the confusion that followed, the keys to the vault's safe-deposit boxes were lost. In the years since, Cleveland's wealthy businessmen kept the truth buried in the abandoned high-rise. The ransacked offices and forgotten safe-deposit boxes remain locked in time, until young engineer Iris Latch stumbles upon them during a renovation survey. What begins as a welcome break from her cubicle becomes an obsession as Iris unravels the bank's sordid past. With each haunting revelation, Iris follows the looming shadow of the past deeper into the vault and soon realizes that the key to the mystery comes at an astonishing price.

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Customer Reviews

Interesting story concept, but the story was flat and plodding. I am a book person, and usually think that books are better than the movie version of a book. The later often seems to lose the subtlety, the nuances of the book, the careful character development. This is the first time I've ever read a book and thought while reading it that the (non-existent) movie version might be better. Slow, flat and plodding were the words that kept circling in my head as I was reading. The story concept is interesting: an important bank mysteriously closes overnight. The bank and the high rise building it was in are untouched for years, until an engineering firm is asked to survey the building in connection with a possible purchase. The book tracks dual time periods: the story of an employee (a 16 year old secretary) in the months before the closing and, years later, a fresh out of school engineer assigned by her employer to survey the building. The most interesting aspect of the story is that, when the bank closed, the doors were locked without warning, but desks, files, personal notes, personnel files, bank records and safe deposit boxes, fixtures were left intact, and 24 hour on sight security maintained. When I was about 1/3 into the story it seemed that n.o.t.h.i.n.g. . w.a.s. . h.a.p.p.e.n.i.n.g., so I checked other reviews to see if this story improved, if the pace picked up. Reading the early reviews, I was sure I was reading a different book. Thrilling? Edge of the seat? Even using a broadly generous interpretation of these concepts, there are only one or two scenes I can envision describing this way, and they come at the last 10-15% of the book. The vast majority of the story is narrative, told through the musings of two main characters. For example, in most instances, we don't read about the secretary's workday, we read about her thinking about her workday or thinking about the personalities of the people she works with, or wondering where her friend is, or wondering about the significance of papers she sees. There are parts of the story involving dialog between characters, but many of these parts (not all) are filler and don't really advance the story. For example, the engineer meets her boss at the building and explains to him some of the work she has done, but (from the reader perspective) this is merely retelling what the engineer already mused about in the previous pages: she went to the eighth floor, to the room on the left; it was dusty; she made some measurements; she went to the next room; she saw papers on the floor; she wondered why the papers were left behind; she made some measurements; she looked at some of the papers; she wondered what the papers meant; she decided to take some of the papers with her to look at later; she went to the next room; she made some measurements. . . . There is also dialog with a co-worker she sleeps with, who otherwise has no role in the development of the story. The engineer character is not very interesting and what little development there is leaves a blurry and inconsistent picture. She is in her first job, describes herself as a perfectionist

and straight A student, but routinely shows up to work late, sometimes wearing clothes she slept in, often drinks too much and does almost nothing in the course of the story except go to work (where she is in an abandoned building by herself), go to a bar (again by herself) and go home. The thing is, none of this behavior is relevant-it doesn't advance the story and if it were changed the course of the story would not be impacted. This isn't one of those books where the grammar or writing style are cringingly painful, and there was enough substance to the scene details that I formed a picture of the bank and various locations within it. Another reviewer commented that this was a story in need of an editor. I second that thought.

So I spent my Sunday reading THE DEAD KEY. Long book... and I don't mean the number of pages. I happen to like long books. When I was a regular shopper at my local bookstores, my initial selection was based off thickness (how I discovered Robert Jordan and Terry Goodkind and others of that epic length writing). THE DEAD KEY, however, is largely one single, long wind-up, the pacing not really picking up till well past the last quarter. Mystery? Treasure Hunt? Gothic Horror? Pretty much all of it, and shows masterful thought and planning to D.M. Pulley's credit. It certainly kept me guessing what the final intent of the book was until that last quarter when the last pieces finally began falling into place- not quite all pieces, though. To give a basic idea of narrative style, the story is comprised of two intertwined timelines. It rather reminded me of an old horror 16 bit game I still own, where the actions of one timeline directly impacted the actions of the other, and the swapping around of perspectives kept the revelations coming, the "Ah hah!" moments rolling, the suspense tight with wonderment and discovery, simply an exquisite plotline that has made the game a cult classic. THE DEAD KEY largely captures the same engrossing interest, and kept me going, page after page, chapter after chapter, perspective after perspective, within that same sense of driven fascination. But it is also well padded, well padded indeed, with repeating expositional elements. An incipient alcoholic anti-heroine, whom I didn't find much empathy for, and a naïve, innocent anti-heroine, whose repeated sense of helplessness, panic, and confusion even I began finding a tad tiresome - and I am one of those who relish minutia that others would sigh over. The modern gothic environs, however, are expertly crafted. The tone is psychologically tense with a handful of honest-to-goodness chapter ending cliffhangers. The interlocking aspects never ceased to delight me. And the ending... well, a completion within the same emotional level as Arturo Pérez-Reverte's 1993 novel, THE CLUB DUMAS had concluded with (the novel may be recognized by more as the later movie, THE NINTH GATE). All in all, enjoyable, yet I do have to wonder how even more fantastic these elements would be if the book was the same 477 pages but

made tauter in pacing, richer in action, and, yes, even more deeply layered. Or at least just stronger pacing. I do love narrative minutia, which Frank Herbert and James Clavell being my models of mastery, yet THE DEAD KEY only approaches the cusp of such epic grandeur without quite turning that last key. The narrative is replete with profanity and contains a couple very minor and glossed past sexual encounters. Also, Prime Members can pick TWO Kindle Selections this month.

I'd like to give this book three and a half stars because it was better than ok. I did have problems with the many time transitions and remembering which of the more minor characters went with which time. I didn't have a problem with the 1990's character, a drunk, and such, because I figured she was on her way to redemption, although perhaps the descriptions of drunkenness were a bit repetitive. It is the author's first book, and the writing is clumsy at times. However, the atmosphere of entering the long abandoned bank is well-done, and fascinating. I kept reading and reading to see what would happen. I liked that the whereabouts of the one character was left a bit of a mystery, and the future of the main character was left that way too. I would definitely be interested in reading more by this author, and would recommend this book.

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