

Organisation name

The String Diaries by Stephen Lloyd Jones

Date of meeting Friday 14th February 2025

Next meeting: Friday 14th March The Country Girls by Edna O'Brien

1. About the author

There is not much information out there about Stephen Lloyd Jones. He is a relatively new author. He was born in 1973 and grew up in Chandlers Ford, Hampshire. He studied at Royal Holloway College, university of London. He now lives in Surrey with his wife, three sons, a mad cocker pop and loads of books!. Aside from his family, he likes strong coffee, telling stories and spending time in the mountains.

The String Diaries is his debut novel and was published in 2013. It was a Radio Two Book Club selection, a Kindle editors pick and was translated into nine different languages. In 2014 he published the follow up novel Written in Blood. He has two further publications: The Disciple 2016 and The Silenced 2018.

2. About the book

The String diaries is a novel with aspects of action, horror and the supernatural. A neo gothic treat, richly imagined and powerfully told. The roots of the story were thought to be in Hungarian folklore but it is entirely created by the author.

The story covers several generations, and is complex – jumping between places and different times. It is fast paced and full of suspense. It is difficult to know who is evil and who can be trusted.

3. Discussion and questions

Should we have and sympathy with Jakab? Was he evil?

Yes! He was a shape shifter who raped brutally and misled people. When he is first introduced we see him as a late developer who didn't fit in. Some of the group thought he was deformed in some way. He didn't match up to other family members and they were unkind to him but would that have led him to exhibit such extreme behaviour as he grew up. There showed a lot of cruelty in the way he treated animals and people.

How did we feel about the ending?

The ending felt sloppy. A bit contrived and rushed to wind things up.

The title of the Book links to the string that was tied around the diaries that were kept by Nicole from previous generations but there is also a string – a thread that goes through the generations. Bereavement and the loss of lives echoes through the generations.

Summarise the discussion for each issue, state the outcome and assign any action items.

It was a very different genre for many of the group. It had echoes of Dracula, Twilight ... and Sky Fall (James Bond).

Where did the money come from over the years? It was explained why Hannah had access to the properties but what about Jakab?

We discussed the characters – none were particularly liked. Maybe Charles, Sebastian and Gabriel were ok although it is hard to know if they were who they appeared to be as the story unfurled.

It wasn't badly written but it was ridiculous. There was atmosphere and tension which kept me reading.

Why didn't they prepare themselves more...one shotgun was never going to be enough! If Hannah's husband was ex-army why wasn't there an armoury.

This book didn't raise a discussion on feminism?? The women were a bit weak. Why didn't they poison the man or cut his throat with a kitchen knife?! They just tried to avoid him.

Lots of characters and different races to get to know... The Hosszir Elet, the Eletek, Tonarch, Fonok, Orokas Forok, Signour, ex signour, Presidente. As well as all the different people in the different time scales. Took a while to piece them all together and find the connections.

4. Final thoughts

It was vastly, awful. But I did get through it!

Too much violence and gore and unnecessarily graphic descriptions i.e. the mouse, the exploding melon heads.

Unusual and interesting. Hard to imagine that Hannah would make the mistake of going to her father ... it was obviously Jakab!

Were the Eleni good or not? Hard to decide!

I did keep reading it, to see what happened! It was compulsive even though some parts were stupid, repetitive, ridiculous, and gory! It took three generations to get a plan together!

If it is compulsive, does it mean we should read it? Certainly not encouraged to read any more of his books.

I did, I needed to find out if he had really died.... He hadn't!! The sequel was even more gruel some!

I definitely didn't want to read at night!

It's a thriller, horror, science fiction book written by a male author. We tried it but didn't necessarily enjoy it! Are we happier with female authors?

Summarise the discussion for each issue, state the outcome and assign any action items.

I didn't learn anything from the book – there were no places or history to identify with.

He should get another job, give up writing and do something useful!

This was one book I really didn't enjoy. I forced myself to read it. The amount of violence and gore was too much. Poor Leah had an awful childhood. I only rate it a one and that was solely for the historical perspective.

A ghastly book. I read for entertainment this was distasteful. Not a gentler for me.

It's a time shift novel not fantasy, just weird. the whole thing was strange and contrived.

Compelling reading. Wanted to know what happened. Read quite quickly. Don't like super natural books and don't usually read and I'm not rushing to read the follow up!

It seemed like quite a good story to start with. I didn't mind the time differences but the violence and the ending got to me.

A good sense of atmosphere and tension but too fantastical and gory. Difficult to follow. Confusing.

Thought it was ridiculous and tedious. You would have thought that after three generations they would have had a plan. Not just a cut and run attitude. The terror they felt should have spurred them into action.

It draws you in and you want to know what happens. There were aspects I didn't like though and found it repetitive at times. Loved the fact they could change the colour of their eyes. Clear descriptions of this.

5. Scores

5, 4, 4, 5, 3, 3, 5, 6, 1, 2.

Overall 3. Not a favourite!