Under the Covers ....

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The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America by Erik Larson bogged me down quite a bit. The premise is intriguing enough; the details of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair are blended with what facts are known about a serial killer on the loose at the time. Larson blends the stories of two men in this account. Daniel H. Burnham is the architect responsible for constructing this larger-than-life fair, while H.H. Holmes is the serial killer luring victims by parading around as a charismatic medical doctor at the same time the fair was underway.

I enjoy history and I especially love Chicago, so I was expecting to really get into this book. The problem lies within the amount of minutiae described in great detail here, particularly surrounding the construction of the fair. If you're an architectural buff and like soaking up every last aspect of a project such as something on the grand scale of a world's fair, then those chapters might not slow you down. I found myself skimming much of these sections, as they did not completely hold my interest.

The chapters devoted to the serial killer were more exciting, although I wonder if the book might have been better off being split into two separate entities – one about the architect, and one about the serial killer. The combining of the two is what really reeled me in, though upon reading I think it might have worked better in theory than execution.

The reality of what made for the inspiration of this book is definitely fascinating, but I found that I learned more about the events by doing some Googling and reading about the fair and the story of Holmes, the killer, separately.

Give this book a try if you don't mind some long and tedious background information. Read it if you have nothing but time on your hands. If you prefer to get to the point, research the events on your own.

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