



The Doll

Taylor Stevens

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“A heroine every bit as provocative as Stieg Larsson’s Lisbeth Salander.” –*The Dallas Morning News*

Haunted by a life of violence and as proficient with languages as she is with knives, Vanessa Michael Munroe, chameleon and hunter, has built her life on a reputation for getting things done—dangerous and often not-quite-legal things. Born to missionary parents in lawless Africa, taken under the tutelage of gunrunners, and tortured by one of the jungle’s most brutal men, Munroe was forced to do whatever it took to stay alive.

The ability to survive, fight, adapt, and blend has since taken her across the globe on behalf of corporations, heads of state, and the few private clients who can afford her unique brand of expertise, and these abilities have made her enemies.

On a busy Dallas street, Munroe is kidnapped by an unseen opponent and thrust into an underground world where women and girls are merchandise and a shadowy figure known as The Doll Maker controls her every move. While trusted friends race to unravel where she is and why she was taken, everything pivots on one simple choice: Munroe must use her unique set of skills to deliver a high-profile young woman into the same nightmare that she once endured, or condemn to torture and certain death the one person she loves above all else.

Driven by the violence that has made her what she is, cut off from help, and with attempts to escape predicted and prevented, Munroe will hunt for openings, for solutions, and a way to strike back at a man who holds all the cards. Because only one thing is certain: she cannot save everyone.

In this high-octane thriller for fans of Lee Child, Stieg Larsson, and Robert Ludlum's Bourne trilogy, Vanessa Michael Munroe will have to fight fast, smart and furiously to overcome a dangerous nemesis and deliver her trademark brand of justice.

The Doll Details

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Author : Taylor Stevens

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From Reader Review The Doll for online ebook

Zoeytron says

This is a tautly written thriller that serves up a nasty tale of human trafficking. The tension is non-stop with lots of action.

The antagonist here is the Doll Maker, a cruel, diminutive man who dresses in impeccably tailored suits. Smug, sometimes displaying a sly smile, he dispenses his horrible orders to his minions with a soft voice filled with gloat. He ensconces himself in his office which houses a collection of dolls - lots of them. He holds them, strokes their hair, fusses with their clothing and caresses their china faces. There is something very wrong with this creepy individual.

Although the comparisons to Steig Larsen's Lizbeth Salander are apt, Taylor's Michael Munroe is more approachable, somewhat less prickly in general. I was quite taken with her. She lives on the edge of the grid, is skilled in the use of knives, pressure points, and duct tape (the perfect weapon - so many uses). Michael can masquerade as a male and her ability to blend is awesome, as is her peculiar ease with languages.

It is rather refreshing to read a book that doesn't employ the use of labeled POVs, which seem to be the golden child of novels these days. Although there is certainly nothing wrong with that style, I really don't want to find it in each and every book.

This was a Goodreads first-reads giveaway, thank you.

Maxine (Booklover Catlady) says

This is book three in the Vanessa Munroe series, I have a feeling I might have got more from this book if I had read prior books in the series.

This book left me with very mixed feelings about it, I liked certain aspects of it then was bored and uninterested in others, so this is not an easy review to write.

Information specialist Vanessa 'Michael' Munroe has a global reputation for getting things done, often dangerous and violent things.

But her reputation has brought her dangerous enemies.

On a busy Dallas street, Munroe is kidnapped by an unseen opponent and thrust into an underground world where women and girls are merchandise and a shadowy figure known as The Doll Maker controls her every move.

Now everything pivots on one simple choice: Munroe must use her unique set of skills to deliver a high-profile young woman into the same nightmare that she once endured, or condemn to torture and certain death the one person she loves above all else.

The overall plot sounded fantastic but I felt it was too wordy and almost not simplified enough for the

reader to really grasp what was going on. I was confused for much of the book.

Vanessa Munroe was a great character and I can see how reading prior books would have her grow on you as a lead character. All the scenes in the book that she was in I loved. Everything else just lost me.

International trafficking of women with a twist, a man called The Doll Maker, he does just that. I leave it at that lest I spoil things for you. I was so excited that this was going to be such a great page turner, but it wasn't.

Where this book lost me was in long winded chapters that had a lot of talking and not a lot of action, some of it not even adding to the book. My brain struggled to connect characters and remember them even chapter to chapter, I was going "hang on, who was he again?", if you know what I mean? They did not become real to me, just loads of names and the start of the book in my opinion is hugely confusing that's why I don't think this one works as a stand alone.

For me personally as a reader, this is a 2 star read (okay), but because the actual writing is pretty good and the scenes that star Vanessa Munroe in them I will award it 3 stars. I think this would suit fans of the classic thriller, think the Jason Bourne books etc. Which is not really my favourite type of thriller. I was sucked in by the complexity and mystery of why Vanessa has the abilities she does. The rest? You can keep it.

Some will truly love this book, personal taste and all that. So I suggest making your own mind up on this one. I tasted it and it did not do enough to get me running in for more.

I received a copy of this book thanks to the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Ian Wood says

This is the complete review as it appears on my novel, TV & movie review blog. Note that there are links in the blog review which are not reproduced here, and that any updates or modifications to the blog review will not be replicated here.

I rated this novel WARTY!

Note: Some Spoilers!

So why would a nation which overthrew the monarchy sport a publishing company called Crown Publishing? Another mystery for Vanessa Michael Munroe to crack?! This novel, published by Crown, is the third in an ongoing series of which Munroe is the main character. Note that I haven't read the previous two. The back-cover blurb compares Munroe with Lisbeth Salander of The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo fame, but apart from the fact that both were abused when they were younger, they have absolutely zero in common. Let this be a warning to all who do not self-publish: there is no limit whatsoever to the stupid things your publisher will lard your novel up with, and no end to how misleading back-cover blurbs can be! Those blurbs are not there for your guidance or for your education; they're there for one purpose and for one purpose only: to trick you into buying the novel! Fortunately, since I borrowed this from the library, I was far more willing to take a risk, so it wasn't an issue for me

There is some prior history going on with this volume, but it's almost completely irrelevant to the story told

here as far as I can see, so if you picked this up out of order, as I did (and there is no indication on the cover to tell a prospective reader that this is "Book x of the Blah Blah series") you won't miss anything. Plus, it's blessedly told in third person (maybe the fourth in this series will be told in the fourth person? Hmm!), so there's none of that absurd and obsessively self-important "I did..., then I did..., then I wanted to..., then I saw...." garbage to wade through.

This volume doesn't even open with the main character except in that her colleague (and romantic interest, evidently) at a private security company observes her being tranquilized and kidnapped from the parking lot as she comes in to work. He's so incompetent that he can't do anything about it! As they try to trace who took Munroe, we meet her in person in the company of her foreign and very callous kidnappers, from somewhere in central Europe. She's required by these people to transport a "package" from A to B, or her brother Logan (no, it's not The Wolverine!) will be hurt even more than he was hurt already when they kidnapped him. The package is also kidnapped. She's a young, Hollywood celebrity: Neeva Eckridge who, we're told is the daughter of a US senator, but no one seems to know this? I don't buy that something like that would never have been ferreted out by the media. Or that someone would be so stupid as to try and kidnap a celebrity of her stature for his own personal use.

I picked up this novel because I was interested in Munroe, but the chapters roughly alternate between her and her partner, Bradford, who was completely uninteresting to me. I started skipping any chapter in which he was featured, and honestly didn't feel that I missed anything! What does that say about one third of this novel?! I got everything I needed from spending my time only with Munroe and Eckridge. I found their relationship fascinating - one kidnappee effectively forced to kidnap the other and take her across Europe to Monaco! Not that this made any sense whatsoever.

I was interested because I don't recall reading a story of this nature before. It was (to me) a really good and intriguing idea; it didn't develop in the way I had thought (and hoped) it might, though, and the ending really was pathetic and inexplicable. Plus Stevens left way too many loose threads to carry over into the next volume - just like she left some from the previous volume carrying over into this one. The main loose thread was Kate Breeden, apparently a friend of Munroe's from earlier adventures, but who betrayed Munroe and got herself jailed, then betrayed her further, from inside the jail - and then escaped from jail to no doubt reappear in Volume 4. That did nothing for me save inflict a mild feeling of déjà saturé (already nauseous). I only mention this because it's important for the ending (not my nausea; the fact that Munroe did not terminate Breeden with extreme prejudice in whatever earlier volume she'd had the chance to do so).

There is very little exchange between the two kidnap victims to the point where they start their road trip, and not a whole heck of a lot afterwards, unfortunately. That's what I'd been looking forward to, and I didn't get it! Eckridge's new "captor" is more interested in how to get out of this mess, obviously, but there is an added twist in that one of Munroe's kidnappers, a younger man, the nephew of the man who orchestrated all of this, seems to be developing some remote low-level feelings for Munroe. He and a heavy (conveniently the one against whom Munroe has a grudge) are following their victims, observing them from out of sight, tracking their every movement, and controlling those movements by means of text messages to a phone Munroe is carrying. Plus both Munroe and Eckridge have their clothing bugged as well as the cheap crappy car in which they are traveling, and as well as the phone they were issued to stay in touch with the kidnappers.

I enjoyed this cat and mouse, finding it entertaining, and I was interested in how Munroe was going to get out of it. The problem is that she didn't. She made no attempt whatsoever during the two sleepless days of the trip to communicate anything to Eckridge about her plans or her reasons for doing what she was doing. Thus when Eckridge tried to make a run for it, I had thought the two of them had planned it when they were out of earshot of their trackers, using a noisy rest room. They had not. Eckridge was going it alone, and Munroe

used this attempt to procure for herself a cell phone, which she then used to send her partner Bradford some text messages communicated in Morse code (since the car was bugged and she couldn't tell him everything in plain English). Superficially, this seems ingenious, but it's really stupid given that Munroe could have simply (and in Eckridge's ignorance) turned on the phone, called Bradford's number, and then simply engaged Eckridge in a conversation explaining to her where exactly they were and what was going on - fooling the kidnapers into thinking she was educating Eckridge, when she was really cluing-in Bradford.

There was an interesting problem from the writing perspective here. On p139, Stevens writes: "Bradford lay back on the sofa, head to one side...". When I reached that point I had thought it meant his head was turned to one side, but Stevens finished the sentence: "...feet to the other..." Obviously he was laying down lengthwise on the sofa, but the way Steven phrased it robbed me of that understanding to begin with. Why did she choose to say "head to one side", rather than "head to one end"? I don't know. It's just another thing which can trip-up your narrative flow, and let your reader stumble. It's very minor - the rest of Stevens's writing is quite acceptable, so I wouldn't fault her for this. It's just one thing, but something for which a writer needs to be constantly vigilant when putting words on paper. Which, of course, reminds me of a Monty Python sketch (as so most things!). As John Cleese put it, "Ah, well, I don't want you to get the impression it's just a question of the number of words! I mean, getting them in the right order is just as important." I can't add anything to that. And now let's go straight over to James Gilbert at Leicester....

Anyway, in conclusion I'm going to have to rate this warty, because there were problems and the ending was a disaster in more ways than one. One problem, for example, was that Eckridge did not even realize that Munroe was a woman until a day into their trip! Now admittedly, Munroe was inexplicably disguised as a guy for the trip, but really? They had been living in each other's laps, talking from time to time, and using the rest room together for a day, and Eckridge never figured out the obvious? Nor did Stevens communicate Eckridge's knowledge deficit to the reader in way way, shape, or form! The ending? It was not only unsatisfactory, it was downright stupid. Let me give one spoiler. In the closing chapters, and knowing that Kate Breeden - whom she let live in an earlier volume - has totally screwed her over and caused deaths in doing so, Munroe then blithely chooses to let one of her kidnapers live, when the smart thing to do, and especially to do in light of her gross error of judgment with Breeden, would be to kill him.

She fails, and with that (and other issues), so, too, does this novel. I don't want to hear how tough, and mean, and decisive, and can-do, and feisty, and Salander-like she is and then find out she has let two dangerous people live, the second one in full knowledge of what a deadly mistake she'd made by letting the first one live. Her interaction with this kidnapper guy reminded me of that Woody Allen line in what, for me, is his best movie: Annie Hall when he does battle with two spiders in Annie's bathroom, armed with nothing more than a large tennis racket, and she's crying over her sad life when he returns. Thinking she's upset about the passing of the arachnid couple, he asks her, "What did you want me to do, capture and rehabilitate them?"

I am the first to admit that trite, happy endings are never good, and even decent happy endings are sometimes not as good as a sad ending, but for Stevens to end this one the way she did turned me right off. If it were not for the crappy way she rolled this up, with so many loose threads the pages were almost falling out of the binding, I might have been willing to give this a 'worthy' rating, but given the totality of what I had to deal with here, I'm rating it warty, and advising you that I have no plans whatsoever to read any more of this series which is sad, 'cause I could have used another really good femme fatale in my life!

JoAnne Pulcino says

THE DOLL: A Novel

Taylor Stevens

Its official I'm a complete Taylor Stevens junkie now!!! After three books I'm convinced she is the real thing. There is so much that could be said about her thrillers from the sensational, scary and violent character of Vanessa Michael Munroe to the pulse pounding, spellbinding plots.

THE DOLL is a riveting action plot driven adventure that begins with Munroe being kidnapped and thrown into an underground world where women and young girls are merchandise. The mastermind has the nickname the doll maker and has kidnapped a high profile young woman for a particular sadist and depraved wealthy client. Munroe is given the job of delivering the young woman to the client or the people she loves will be killed. For Munroe to hand this young woman over to some of the horror of her past traumas becomes impossible. Munroe must find a way to save her, hopefully herself and her loved ones by facing her dangerous nemesis and delivering her trademark brand of justice.

We are experiencing a wave of thriller fiction featuring women who possess the same instinctual qualities of mercenaries or military experts. You've come a long way baby is not just a tag line anymore. It would be fascinating to trace this evolution which I'm not equipped to do, but in the meantime I am just going to look forward to more of Ms. Stevens's books.

The driving force, the plot and the adventure are all centered on Vanessa Michael Munroe. In that light it is imperative that some of her background and motivation be addressed. Estranged from missionary parents in Africa, she became a pawn for a gunrunner, was tortured by an extremely brutal man, had to learn how to defend herself and survive. She became skilled in tactics and strategy and learned to fight, adapt and blend. Her education on the streets and in the world has made her a prolific linguist, with exquisitely honed killer instincts. This haunted, violent woman with a scary dark streak is painfully aware of her closeness to sanity's edge.

Bravo, Taylor Stevens

L.A. Starks says

This is a natural follow-on series for anyone who likes the Stieg Larsson trilogy, or any other thriller series, such as books by Vince Flynn, Brad Taylor, Patricia Cornwell, Ben Coes, Alex Berenson, etc. While/because Vanessa Michael Munroe is deeply psychically wounded, she is also phenomenally capable and self-aware--an action heroine for the times.

Stevens gives readers nonstop conflict on every page and writes with ease about settings as diverse as Croatia, Italy...and Texas.

Jeffrey says

Taylor Stevens Vanessa Munroe series has been marketed extensively and compared favorably to the Lisbeth

Salander series. Both series do share a strong female character who fights violence and investigate crimes against women, and both Salander and Munroe do not fit established images of how women are to behave. The Munroe series also takes on tough world situations.

Vanessa Munroe, dressing like a man, and sometimes mistaken for a man, is a trained killer and experienced in the various ways that men try to take advantage of women. From the first book in this series, *The Informationist*, which dealt with rape and revenge, Stevens has put Munroe in difficult situations. Munroe has triumphed, but each book leaves scars on the character and the reader. Her latest book, *The Doll*, the third in the series, is again a taut tough look at another world situation that is evil - the kidnapping of young girls for the sex slave trade. No reader will come away from this book unscathed about her descriptions of how women are treated and marketed as cattle to be sold to the highest bidder.

Munroe is kidnapped from her adopted home in the US and whisked away to a foreign country. *The Doll Man*, a notorious leader of an underground sex slave ring has a job for her to do. He wants her to deliver Neeva Eckridge, a kidnapped beautiful world renowned Hollywood starlet, to her buyer, who has picked her out and wants to possess her for aims that become clear as the book goes on. Normally Munroe would not stand for this type of assignment and is clearly able to kill the Doll Man, but the Doll Man, has been supplied information from a criminal that Munroe locked up in jail, and has also kidnapped a friend of Munroe and is torturing him. If Munroe does not do what he wants, her friend will die.

So Munroe decides to help the Doll Man transport Neeva to her buyer, while hoping that her friend Bradford can successfully find her friend and rescue him before Munroe has finished her delivery job.

The book is split between Bradford's hunt for the missing friend and Munroe's journey with Neeva. The tension is high. Munroe is acting against her nature to help a monster. The character of Neeva is very well defined, and is no soft starlet. She is equally tough and fights to survive as well.

What mars the book, in my mind, and what seems to be inevitable is the second half of the book, when as we can expect Munroe confronts the Doll Man and his men. Characters make decisions that did not make realistic sense. Maybe they heightened the plot and the tension, but they did not ring true.

Nonetheless, the book does deliver a healthy dose of tension, action and is an all around very good thriller. Stevens again exposes the underbelly of the world through the Munroe series. There is evil in the world and depravity and Munroe is a good character to have to fight it. This is a good series if you like thrillers.

Maryellen says

I was fortunate to receive an advance copy of this book to read and it did not disappoint. If you are a fan of that other famous trilogy about a young woman in peril, then you'll like Taylor Stevens take on a similar protagonist, even if it feels a bit familiar.

I read the first two books in quick succession and then there was a lag before this one came to me. I found that I couldn't quite remember some of the details of the first two books which had some impact on my following this plot in the beginning. As the story developed, it became far less of an issue. The action begins in the first pages and for the most part doesn't let up even when it's occurring with separate characters on different continents. This volume explores human trafficking and gives a rather superficial view of the

victims' plight, focussing rather on the main character Vanessa/Michael. While I enjoyed this read and will continue to follow this series, I hope that the author explores the protagonist's continuing healing a bit more in the next versions. I recommend this book, but think if you read the first two you'll enjoy it more.

Luanne Ollivier says

Doesn't the cover of The Doll just promise an 'edge of your seat' read? And Taylor Stevens delivers one....again!

I've devoured the first two books featuring Vanessa Michael Munroe - The Informationist and The Innocent - and have been early awaiting the third novel to feature this kick*** character. The Doll releases today.

Vanessa Michael Munroe is....well, she's deadly, with incredible physical skills and she's brilliant - she speaks many languages and easily assimilates into the situation or culture she finds herself in. She can read people and situations and think three moves ahead. She's also a bit of an enigma - her past is murky and has shaped her into the woman she is today. For a living, she hunts.... people. She's the shadowy figure people call on to do the impossible. Her weak spot? Innocents.

When the last book left off, Michael had allowed herself to let down her guard a bit and enjoy her relationship with Bradford - the owner of Capstone Security Consulting. In this latest book Michael herself is the one taken. A criminal kingpin called The Doll Maker has 'recruited' Michael to deliver a package - a living doll ordered by a wealthy client. To ensure her compliance, he has also taken hostage one of the few people Michael has let get close to her - Logan, the man she considers her brother.

The Doll is told in two narratives. First, from Bradford's point of view as he and his crew try to track down and rescue both Michael and Logan. Secondly from Michael's as she tries to figure out a way to save herself and her 'package'. And then destroy The Doll Maker. Each storyline was equally addictive and kept me rapidly turning pages as the action escalated. And it truly is non stop.

What makes Steven's writing so good is her lead character. It's so much fun to have such a - as I mentioned earlier - kick*** female character. The action scenes are great, but there's a deeper level to this character as well. She is the walking wounded and Stevens does a fantastic job depicting Munroe's inner emotional turmoil and her physical struggle to control herself. Each book out, we learn a little bit more about Munroe and her background. She is a fascinating enigma. And a character I'm hooked on. Read an excerpt of The Doll. You'll be hooked too!

Here's what Lee Child, author of the Jack Reacher books has to say...."Munroe is a sensational character and Stevens is a sensational writer, and together they put The Doll high on my books-of-the-year list."

You could read The Doll as a stand alone, but I really do recommend starting with The Informationist to fully appreciate this series. (Film rights for this The Informationist have been optioned to James Cameron)

Well, I raced through The Doll far too quickly.... I'll be eagerly waiting for book number four.

Jacqui says

Taylor Stevens gets better with each book. This--"The Doll" (Crown 2013)--is her third in the Vanessa Michael Munroe series, and in my estimation, the best. Her Munroe character is unlike any other out there in the thriller genre. She is severely damaged by events in her life, but uses those scars to thrive as an informationist--finding information and sometimes people for others. With spot-on instincts, the ability to connect the dots even when she can't see them, and a facility with both mental and physical weapons, she is not someone you want to anger.

In this third book, she has found a level of peace with Miles Bradford, a man who cherishes her for what she is, watches her back, and understands her needs. That is shattered when she is kidnapped by the Doll Maker, an international human trafficker, to deliver another kidnapped woman into the hands of a psychotic misogynist. The Doll Maker knows threatening Munroe's life won't work for she cares little whether she lives or dies, so instead, dangles the life of one of her few friends, promising to release them both once she has succeeded in her mission. She complies, hoping Bradford will rescue her friend while she figures out how to save the second kidnapped woman. Munroe uses the full gamut of mental and physical tricks in an impossible quest to bring everyone out alive, barely maintaining control of the voices in her mind insisting she solve the problem with extreme violence, not mental canny.

And then the Doll Maker makes a mistake. He kills Noah, the rare man Munroe allowed into her life. The last man she loved, if she let herself admit that. Now, Munroe will not be satisfied with simply escaping with the life of her charge. Now, she must destroy the Doll Maker, his organization, and everyone around them.

Stevens is a unique writer, with an almost stream of consciousness approach to the life-and-death plot. When the reader is with Munroe, we feel her pain, her battle to do what must be done while tamping down the demons that constantly lurk below the surface of her consciousness. Every minute of the day, she struggles to control her self-conscious, her addictions, the fury at injustice that becomes a visceral presence trying to control her thoughts and actions. Where the story could be considered a fairly typical plot, Vanessa Michael Munroe make it anything but.

If you haven't read the first two books, read those before Doll Maker. Then, sign up with Crown to be notified every time Stevens publishes a new book.

Roxane says

The thing about this series is that it is so gleefully violent and dark that it makes you go with the flow. Michael is being forced to help a sex trafficker but the woman she has to transport has more mettle than Michael originally anticipates. They start to work together while on the homefront, Bradford Miles tries to save the day. I love this series but I hate how when we have tormented characters like this, they never get to stay, consistently, in a relationship. Like, BREAK THE MOLD, writers. MILES AND MICHAEL FOREVER.

Laura says

The previous book actually raised some interesting questions about joining a cult, while this one, which could have raised equally interesting questions about human trafficking chose to stay with the violence and mystery behind Michael's life. As a result, I was less impressed with this one. We get a lot of clues into her back story, more than in the previous book, which supposedly explain how she got to be the way she is. We're also told - repeatedly - that she has some weird wiring in her brain that makes it easy for her to learn languages (Hungarian is the new one). Understanding her and her motivations doesn't really help make her likable or interesting, sadly.

The plot revolves around the Doll Man's kidnapping of Neeva, an up-and-coming starlet who just happens to be the daughter of two prominent people, who, coincidentally have hired Michael to find their missing daughter. He also kidnaps Michael and brings her to Europe to ensure that Neeva is delivered to her buyer; Logan, one of Michael's closest friends, is kidnapped and tortured to ensure that Michael behaves. Of course, things don't go according to plan. Back in the States, Bradford is doing what he can to help her - and chaos and death ensue.

Neeva never felt like a real character, and the others are expendable. What interest I had in Michael (or Essa... Vanessa... etc.) was lost in the thriller formula.

ARC provided by publisher.

Jamie Arledge says

This is the 3rd book in the Vanessa Michael Munroe series and I've read them all. I absolutely LOVE this series. From someone that reads about 60 books a year I've got to say that not only is this the best series that I've ever read but Vanessa Michael Munroe is my all-time favorite female character. She is very one of a kind and can kick some major butt.

This story was just as good as the first 2 books in the series but since Munroe played a different role in this book she didn't get the opportunity to unleash her butt-kicking self as often as she did in the previous books. I really missed that in this book. In this book she was the prey rather than the hunter so the opportunity just didn't rise that often. She still had some great moments but it was just a bit different from the last 2 books.

This book was near impossible for me to put down. I just couldn't wait to see what was going to happen next. I had a few laughs as well as some tears along the way. This series is so good that if a new book was released every week I'd be happy reading nothing but this series for years to come. I hope Taylor keeps the series coming and I'd love to see it be turned into a movie as rumored.

I would highly recommend this book. If you haven't read the previous 2 you won't understand why Munroe is the way she is so I highly recommend reading all 3 of these books in order. #1 Informationist, #2 The Innocent & #3 The Doll.

Sam says

Tak d?siv? realistické, až se tomu bojím dát p?t hv?zd.

Patrice Hoffman says

I'll start by summing up my review: I loved this adventure with Vanessa Michael Munroe!!!! Taylor Stevens has made a fan of me after only reading one novel, out of order in fact. Sure it's not flawless but is exactly what I want in an action, suspense thriller.

The novel begins with Bradford checking out leads for where Vanessa Michael Munroe could be. The teams' intel suggests that she was involved in an "accident" that set the stage for her kidnapping. This kidnapping was orchestrated by the infamous Dollmaker. He specializes in ripping women away from their lives in order to supply an endless variation of young women for his wealthy clientele. Only this time he's chosen to kidnap the wrong person.

The Dollmaker forces Munroe into an undesired mission by holding the fate of the person she loves most over her head. Munroe reluctantly agrees to completing the mission so long as the one she holds dear remains alive. Although she isn't naive, and is convinced she's dead along with Logan once the Dollmaker's requests are granted, she still moves forward with moving precious, human cargo to the big-wig that's demanding the product. Not only is she faced with delivering this famous cargo in one piece, she's responsible for maintaining the "doll" in a certain condition.

Enter Steven's weak link. Neeva is probably one of the most recognized faces at the time she's been kidnapped. Her celebrity makes the mission especially difficult but to add insult to injury, she's one of the worse hostages possible. Initially she comes off as a brat. I personally couldn't stand her but I understood that her role was necessary in moving the story forward. I guess I was so busy rooting for Munroe that I failed to realize that Neeva was fighting for her own life just the same.

Pushed up against the ropes, Taylor Stevens presents to newbies (like me) a woman who's more than capable of holding her own. A master of disguise, a true polyglot, and skilled in the art of complete badassery. I mean really!!!! Is there nothing Munroe can't do? Actually, that brings me to my first gripe. Stevens wastes no time to remind readers, newbies and dedicated fans alike, of the many ways in which Munroe is not to be messed with. After hearing for the umpteenth time that the men were speaking languages, assuming she couldn't understand but in fact really could, it got a little redundant. Then to keep reminding me that she's able to use anything, I mean absolutely **ANYTHING** as a weapon got to be grating. In my opinion, Munroe's Rambo-esque ambition needed no more justification.

My final gripe is one of my own doing. When I entered in the Goodreads Giveaway to win this novel it was only because I was slightly interested in the blurb and wasn't going to be heartbroken if I'd lost. To top it off, I didn't pay attention to the fact that this was a part of a series. Usually I can read books out of succession so long as the author is good enough to keep me posted on trivial background aspects without ruining previous novels should I read them at a later date. Ultimately, I felt that all the characters, even Munroe, were a little one dimensional. Again I say that's my fault because I didn't take the time (time I really don't have) to catch up with all the characters in a manner that wouldn't leave me wanting more. I take some of the blame, but for the rest I'm giving Taylor Stevens the honor. A great author writes each novel, even in a series, as if they are

reaching out to an audience that hasn't been following the characters from inception.

My gripes aside, The Doll was gripping from page one. Taylor Stevens manages to never allow me one moment to become bored with her story. She goes inside of the corrupt, despicable world of human trafficking and forces readers to consider what morals they will dismiss in the hopes of saving the one they love. And then leave you wondering if the life of the one you love is truly worth more than the life of an innocent. I look forward to reading another adventure of Stevens' featuring Vanessa Michael Munroe. Munroe proves that you don't send any man in to do a woman's job. Yes!!!!!!

Copy provided by Broadway Books (Random House) via Goodreads Giveaway

Michelle Lancaster says

A Vanessa Michael Munroe Novel

By Taylor Stevens

Crown Publishers, 335 pgs

978-0-307-88878-5

Submitted by Crown Publishers

Rating: 4.5

And they're off! The Doll bursts out of the starting gate like Secretariat at Aqueduct. This is no exaggeration: page one and our heroine is darted like a bear and kidnapped by homicidal Croatians masquerading as paramedics in an ambulance stolen from the city of Dallas. Miles Bradford, lover, PTSD-sufferer, spy extraordinaire and Boy Robin, witnesses the scene from his office window.

This sets off a vicious romp across countries, oceans and continents but not in search of Michael, oh no, Michael can more than handle herself. Turns out she's been "hired" by The Doll Maker, a bat-shit crazy, child-sex-slave trafficking, scum of the earth, who only passes as human because he has opposable thumbs. Michael is being coerced into delivering a particularly valuable "package" (read: kidnapped woman) to a client, as penance for what The Doll Maker sees as her past transgressions against his organization and revenue stream. The Doll Maker's minions have kidnapped Logan, the person Michael is closest to in all the world, in order to ensure her cooperation. But watch what happens when she turns the tables.

This is the third installment in the best-selling saga of Vanessa Michael Munroe - chameleon, language-savant, assassin, righteous dispenser of justice. The first volume is *The Informationist*, the second *The Innocent*, both of which have been reviewed on this blog previously. Michael is a female protagonist like none before. She is something truly new under the sun: physically, mentally and emotionally courageous, just like plenty of real women. There are no wasted pages spent on improbable romantic entanglements, no "female" squishiness here. There are facts and logic and strategy and tactics - good lord it's so freeing! And there is the necessary kill. Or a dozen, maybe, who's counting?

In evidence of Michael's reputation, instructions given to the kidnappers, page 22:

Do not let her hear your language, the source had said, she will use language as a weapon. Keep the area around her free of objects, everything will be used as a weapon. Stay clear of her reach, she doesn't need a weapon to kill you. Don't use restraints, she will find a way out of them, and they will only give a false sense of safety. Do not touch her, the source said. Leave her in peace, and treat her respectfully, only then will the

violence stay muted. Disrespect these and make no mistake, she will kill you.

As long as I'm offering samples, here is an example of the way Michael absorbs and assimilates sensory information:

Not real speech, a recording. She could tell that even from this drug-induced haze. She stretched fingertips to the wall and heard from touch the same story told by the smell of this place. Dank. Damp. Buried.

One more. Michael has a knife fetish, upon lifting a knife off a bad guy:

The handle connected with her palm like a creation returning to its mold, metal against skin, familiar and soothing.

I really can't quibble with anything here. The writing is improving on schedule, as it should with a third book. The dialogue is genuine. The pacing is nearly perfect - there are no lulls in the action here. The characterizations are true. The plot is unique to the genre - exactly what genre is this? Taylor Stevens may be inventing a new one and how exciting is that? Just when you think you know where the plot is headed, it arrives in another location entirely. You think you've got it figured out but there are a hundred pages left and what's up with that? And then the tale takes off again, racing onward to a conclusion unexpected, complicated and immensely satisfying.
