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*William Sleator*

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## **Blackbriar** William Sleator

Danny can feel something sinister about his new home, Blackbriar, an old, abandoned cottage in the English countryside. The residents of a nearby town refuse to speak of the house and can barely look Danny in the eyes. Then Danny begins to have strange dreams of fire and witches, and awakes to shrieks of laughter that seem to come from another time and place. With help from his friend, Lark, Danny begins to unravel the mysteries of Blackbriar and its frightening past, through the discovery of an ancient doll and a chilling list of names and dates carved on the cellar door. But what might be most terrifying of all is the mystery that does not lie in the past but in the here and now...

## **Blackbriar Details**

Date : Published January 5th 2012 by Skyscape (first published 1972)

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Author : William Sleator

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# From Reader Review Blackbriar for online ebook

## Susan Mackie Powers says

### A Cool Little Ghost Story

Danny and his his guardian, Phillipa, were tired of the hustle and bustle of London. When the opportunity to buy Blackbriar, an old mansion in the county, they jumped at the chance. Little did they know that Blackbriar was once a pest house, where people who were unwell went to die, and that sinister forces were at work in the small town. The story unfolds as Danny and his new friend, Lark, discover the secrets hidden in Blackbriar and the ghost of the young woman who haunted it. This is a cool little ghost story that I enjoyed very much.

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## Robyn says

Kindle Deal | Not enough depth. | Growing up I returned again and again to the "S" section of the school library, in large part for Sleator's books. They were always so unusual and interesting, and the characters felt real. This book doesn't fit the rest of his oeuvre. This isn't unusual, the underlying premise was pretty clear right off. It's not actually that interesting, more perplexing, because the characters don't make sense. I can't imagine that even as a child I would've found anything redeeming about Danny, and Philippa just didn't make sense--nothing justifies who she is. All that said, target age readers would probably find it fairly creepy.

Side note: there was no reason to write one character as a dwarf. The only purpose it served was to make him physically unusual and separate him from everyone else. I know this isn't a modern book, but it needs to be mentioned that giving the evil crazy antagonist a physical disability to indicate his internal deformity is wrong.

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## Frank says

### Not bad

It's no Interstellar Pig or Green Futures of Tycho but I still enjoyed it. I wish he had been writing at a time when YA fiction was more popular.

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## Julai says

I wish I'd found William Sleator when I was 13, but it's almost more pleasurable to read his books for the first time as an adult. Never pandering, they show their characters' weaknesses as they work to grow stronger--the creepy backdrops and psychological terror are just welcome set dressing.

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## Cathy says

Yeah, it's YA -- but even so, this is pretty weak tea, packed with cliches, stupid dialogue, and a girl sidekick who is introduced as tough but goes all whimpery and arm-clutchy so the wimpy kid protagonist can be a hero. Sleator's *House of Stairs* gave me unforgettable chills when I stumbled upon it in fifth grade, but this this Scooby-Dooish tale of meddling kids thwarting a rural witch coven doesn't really measure up.

Three grudging stars for the deserted house with the secret passage full of skeletons, the portrait of the teenage witch, and oodles of similar gothic trappings which I would have enjoyed to no end if I'd read this as a kid. Also, for Islington the Siamese cat, who's the most compelling character of the lot.

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## Jessica Snyder says

This is a quick read, and enjoyable enough, if you're of the appropriate age. The author does a good job of establishing an air of mystery and menace throughout. But, I read it as an adult, not as an adolescent, so the tale's thinner plot points couldn't help but catch my eye. If I'd read this as a kid, I'm sure I would have given it 4 stars. As an adult, the outdated cliché of evil witches worshipping demons, and the use of a dwarf as a signal of evil mayhem were rather irksome, (as was the notion that a child would simply be allowed to live with a flighty woman, with no formal or legal arrangement, who would feel it was her right to remove him from his home and school with no notice to anyone with legal authority over him--yeah, sure, whatever). The main character is also off-putting in his initial mistreatment of Islington, (a cat who is sometimes the most interesting character in the book)--but, to be fair, as the character grows throughout the novel, this initial behavior becomes starkly contrasted. Of course, this novel was written in a time when such things would have raised nary an eyebrow. There are some good points, too, of course. Islington, the cat, is a fun character, and Philippa, his pampering "owner" (does anyone actually OWN a cat?) is a fine literary example of codependency. Her treatment of Danny (the MC) is a good conversation-starter if you want to discuss smothering and/or unhealthy relationships with an adolescent. There is also some refreshingly astute introspection and empathy on the part of the main character. For the psychological maturity that is engendered by the main character's recognition of, and response to, Philippa's loneliness-bred codependency, this book is a worthwhile read for younger readers. It is a decent yarn.

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## **'Cole L. \*Bookworm Babe, Voyeur of Covers, Caresser of Spines, Unashamed Smut Slut, the Always Sleepy Wurm of the Stacks, and Drinker of Tea and Wine\* says**

very well written, decent character depth, but it felt like there should have been more to the story. I enjoyed it anyways

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## Heather says

Even though *Blackbriar* was written in 1972, it does not seem dated. It is slow to get started and the resolution happened a little too fast, but otherwise the story is very good. By about 1/3 of the way through I had trouble putting it down. My biggest complaint is the overuse of italics to show emphasized words in the

dialogue. I found that very distracting. I really liked Danny and how he evolved and matured over the course of the book. I found the epilogue to be satisfying. I definitely recommend *Blackbriar* by William Sleator.

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### **Amy Lee says**

You know that old sci-fi or supernatural novel you checked out from the library when you were a kid? You've forgotten the title and the author, but you remember the 80s-tastic cover almost clearly... you remember there were these two kids, a boy and a girl, and... and it was thrilling, and it's half-haunted your memory and your dreams ever since.

Just so you know, there's about a 50% chance that book was by William Sleator.

For me, that was Sleator's "Into the Dream;" I hadn't read "Blackbriar" before, but I wasn't surprised that many of the reviews are from adults who half-remember this thrilling book from their childhood. I understand why those reviewers say it didn't live up to their expectations upon rereading. It is really disappointing how Lark is introduced to us as a character who's brave and independent, but turns into a whimpering, arm-clutching coward whenever something scary happens, all in order to propel the (initially cowardly, passive) hero Danny's maturation towards bravery and independence. Why does his gain have to come at her expense? It's very "Secret Garden" (I was a "Little Princess" fan, myself) -- as is the "living in the country turns lazy, sickly city boy healthy and energetic" plotline. And like other reviewers, I found the finale disappointing.

All that said, this book deserves credit for something I haven't seen many reviewers mention. Sleator is a skilled, evocative, incredibly compelling prose writer. No wonder people who read his books in childhood remember moments and images from them so vividly, even when the other details have long faded. I was captivated not only by the gothic thrills and moments of shock he so effectively creates, but by his writing style, his gorgeous ability to describe scenes from the creepy, beautiful house in the woods and scenes from daily life so marvelously. The book was worth the read just for that.

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### **Traci says**

*Blackbriar* is the classic (children's) horror story about a young orphan who moves into a haunted house.

I'm sure if I had read this when I was the appropriate age to enjoy it, my rating would be a little different, but as it is I'm having a really hard time with it. It's also possible that it's just a bit too outdated, for lack of a better term. Things change, and it might have been scary when it was published, but now it's just... campy.

Danny lives with one of the employees of the school he attends, but she isn't his guardian. She convinces him to move out of London and into a country house several hours away. She seems way too flighty to even be allowed around children, even in that time period—she takes this kid out of London and into the country without informing his legal guardian or the school he attends... or anyone else, come to think of it... and when he suggests to her that this might be a bad idea she kind of shrugs it off and says "by the time anyone figures it out, we will be long gone!"

...Okay?

Anyway, the biggest disappointment for me in this whole novel was that it's supposed to be a ghost story. Throughout the whole book it was obvious that no ghosts were appearing, nor were they *going* to appear. The so called "paranormal" happenings in the book were obviously not paranormal at all and that really disappointed me. There were a few "witches," which weren't witches at all but just a bunch of adults playing pretend, and even that didn't show up until the very end of the book.

Now that I think about it... this might have scared me a little when I was five.

I'm not sure that I liked any of the characters, except maybe Lark. Philippa (the secretary) came off as extremely creepy, first by basically kidnapping this kid and then by running all of his friends off, so that she was literally the only person in his life. Danny was just a crabby, lazy boy.

The ending of the book made very little sense to me, too. There was resolution, but it was crammed into the last few sentences and the last page covered a long span of time. I HATE it when books do that. Include an epilogue if you must, but don't cram years of adjustment into three sentences and tie everything up into a neat little bow, please. It just looks like you got tired of writing the book and wanted to move on.

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### **Elisa says**

I liked this haunted house story. The characters are well established at the very beginning, with an opening chapter that makes their relationship clear. The house and woods that surround it are nicely gothic and the ominous feeling and atmospheric descriptions are great. I just didn't quite like the ending.

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### **Jodi says**

For nearly twenty-five years, the story of Blackbriar haunted me. When I was in sixth grade, Mrs. Mullins read it out loud to our reading class. Even in the fully-lit classroom surrounded by kids the story was scary as hell.

After sixth grade I didn't give the book much thought. But whenever anyone asked me about scary books this is the one I'd conjure up. The problem was for years and years I had forgotten the title of the book and wasn't sure if I ever knew the name of the author.

All I could remember was the creepy image of names carved on the back of a door. Each name had a date next to it, effectively making the entire house a giant tombstone. I remember that it had something to do with the Black Plague. But that's it.

Occasionally, I'd ask someone if they'd ever read the black plague with the names on the door book when they were a kid. "You know the one with the tunnel and names, the NAMES. The names on the door!" Because repetition is the surest way to jog someone's memory, right?

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## **Kevin Lucia says**

Really enjoyed it, as I did when I was a kid. Nice gothic tale, good atmosphere, excellent prose. A little campy ending, but it is a YA novel, after all...

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## **Shinynickel says**

Not one of Sleator's best, but not bad either. Some hilarious stuff happens because the book was written in 1972 - at one point a boy's guardian pulls him from school when she shouldn't and takes him far out into the countryside. Her cover story? That she is a teacher traveling alone with her student. An excuse that did not age well.

Basic mystery plot with some spooky stuff happening, and Sleator knows what he's doing so there's nothing bad about it, but it is otherwise a very paint-by-numbers 1970s YA.

It was a fast read, and Sleator keeps the tension up. He's also very good at creating a few resonant, memorable details that stick with you long after you've read the book. Not bad if you have a chance to read it, but nothing to seek out.

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## **Brandy says**

I loved William Sleator's books as a kid, and I read this one several times, always hoping that it would finally make sense and be enjoyable. Thirty years later, it's perfectly understandable and I have no idea why I struggled.

Boy and guardian move to secluded country house that's been empty for ages; house has a Bad Vibe to it and townspeople refuse to talk about it; Boy researches and gets half the story; townspeople still creepy about the house; Bad Vibes take over; Boy and friend solve mystery and put an end to house shenanigans.

This book has atmosphere up the wazoo. What it lacks is... I don't really know. A compelling plot? Characters I care much about? A friend character who doesn't change from Strong Independent Girl to Simpering Damsel to contrast Boy's arc of growing independence and freedom (a heavy-handed metaphor for adolescence if ever there were one)?

So, yeah, I don't know why this never made sense to me. But I do understand why I never loved this one like I did *House of Stairs*.

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