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Catherine's last job ended badly. Corporate bullying at a top TV network saw her fired and forced to leave London, but she was determined to get her life back. A new job and a few therapists later, things look much brighter. Especially when a challenging new project presents itself -- to catalogue the late M. H. Mason's wildly eccentric cache of antique dolls and puppets. Rarest of all, she'll get to examine his elaborate displays of posed, costumed and preserved animals, depicting bloody scenes from the Great War. Catherine can't believe her luck when Mason's elderly niece invites her to stay at Red House itself, where she maintains the collection until his niece exposes her to the dark message behind her uncle's "Art." Catherine tries to concentrate on the job, but Mason's damaged visions begin to raise dark shadows from her own past. Shadows she'd hoped therapy had finally erased. Soon the barriers between reality, sanity and memory start to merge and some truths seem too terrible to be real... in *The House of Small Shadows* by Adam Nevill.

House of Small Shadows Details


Date : Published October 10th 2013 by Tor

ISBN : 9780230771994

Author : Adam Nevill

Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : Horror, Fiction, Mystery, Adult, Fantasy

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From Reader Review House of Small Shadows for online ebook

Helen says

Deliciously fucked-up.

Not my most eloquent review ever, but I just finished reading, and that's the best I can do.

So there.

Baal Of says

What a dull, sleep inducing book. The characters were bland and uninteresting, especially the main character. It started off well enough, but then it meandered through what could have been a tension building path of increasing weirdness, but for me, I just became increasingly disengaged. I found no surprise in the various reveals, in particular around Edith, where I just kept thinking would you please fucking come out and say it; you've been dancing around for well over 100 pages by this point. Some of the writing was weird - awkward weird, not cool, mind-warping weird. For example on page 3, this odd sentence fragment: "She hurried to the porch, when a group of plump black flies formed a persistent orbit around her, and tried to settle upon her exposed hands and wrists. But soon stopped and sucked in her breath." What the fuck? Who did the sucking here the flies or Catherine? I think it might be author - maybe the editor. Maybe a chunk of a sentence was lost.

On page 87, giving some back story on Catherine the phrase "No one ever asked..." struck me as unrealistic, failing to create a realistic portrayal of her situation, rather it felt like the author stretching to make Catherine seem victimy - yeah, that's not a real word.

Another craptastic sentence on page 130 "And here she was again in a room she would not believe existed unless sat inside it." That is some atrocious prose right there. And still nothing much had happened and the story was still going nowhere. By page 304 I had gotten so sick and tired of her whining and pining for Mike, that any sympathy I might have had was gone.

All this negativity might make it seem I should be giving one star instead of two, but there were some decent moments buried in the boredom. The fundamental idea of tying the taxidermy to the disappearances of children was inspired. A couple of the scenes were potentially creepy, and might have been more effective if surrounded by better ambience. This book had promise, it just failed on delivery.

Addendum:

One of the beauties of a good book club is the effect of the differing perspectives on my feeling towards a book. After the meeting of the Nightmare Factory, I have moderated my view on this book a bit, and increased the rating. I think that a substantial part of my negative reaction to this book might have been my own state of mind at the time of reading, and now having discussed this book with Joe, he has convinced me that it is better than my initial assessment would have it. I still don't like the passages that I called out for criticism, but Joe pointed out that those decisions were probably deliberate on the part of the author, and were went to pull the prose in a more poetic direction. Point well taken. I have a personal bias that means I much prefer clarity to obscurity, but this desire conflicts with my also loving weird fiction, which frequently aims for a cloudy and dreamlike feel.

Ginger says

I'm not sure if my rating will be 2.5 or 3 stars. It was a bit of a hot mess at the end and I'm still trying to grapple with what it all meant. The beginning was promising and I really loved the idea of the plot.

Unfortunately, the book did not deliver for me. I'm also not a fan of weak main characters and Catherine was this in spades!

There were some creepy and unnerving moments in the book that pushed up the rating but it wasn't enough to save the book for me. I really wish *Adam Nevill* had figured out what he was going for in the end because **House of Small Shadows** could have been so much more!

†Roxanne†(Death by Book Avalanche) ? says

⊕ 1 Star Rating ⊕

I absolutely hate not finishing books, I really do, so I persevered with this one right to the end (mostly with the hope that it'll get better) but unfortunately I really didn't enjoy this. Instead of this one, I recommend reading *The Ritual* as I thought that one was a lot better.

My main reason for giving this one such a low rating was because I didn't understand it at all. None of it made sense! When I first started reading this book I was totally into it, I enjoy reading about freaky ass dolls as they creep me the hell out...I like that. The dolls weren't even the main focus of the story...now that I mention it i'm not even sure what the main focus of the story was. I didn't like any of the characters, the MC was incredibly annoying with her constant 'This happened...but maybe it didn't...but then this definitely happened...oooh maybe it didn't'. **Boooooored**.

I have a question; 'What the f*ck did happen woman'?

Ash says

Things Adam Nevill Ruined for Me:

Children
The name Leonard
Old houses
The name Edith
Wheelchairs
The name Maude

Things Adam Nevill Made Creepier:

Marionette puppets
Taxidermy

Despite this, and the fact that I read one other book by him, Adam Nevill is rapidly becoming a favorite author of mine. The *House of Small Shadows* is about a young woman named Catherine. After coming off a

violent bullying tactic by a fellow co-worker, she leaves London and works for a smaller valuing firm. She might have hit the jackpot with her latest find: Edith Mason, niece of famous taxidermist M.H. Mason, is allowing Catherine to appraise her uncle's highly valuable collection at the Red House estate.

Catherine is initially excited until she sees firsthand just how demented and macabre Mason's work is and how equally disturbed Edith, and housekeeper Maude, really are. After a bad breakup, Catherine decides to take up Edith's offer on staying at Red House to catalogue to collection. However, that's when things begin to get truly bizarre.

One of the reasons Nevill is becoming a favorite author of mine is because I end up relating to his characters. I did with The Ritual's Luke and did so again with Catherine Howard. I understood that childhood ostracizing and lack of the sense of belonging. The endless loneliness I have felt at some time in my life. Nevill created a sympathetic character in Catherine and I was invested in her fate.

Another reason is that Nevill knows how to write suspenseful horror exquisitely well. To the way he describes Mason's "cruelty plays" and Edith's utter delight in telling the story behind them to Catherine's ongoing struggle to keep ahold of her sanity, it was all compelling and intense. He successfully made the Red House into a complex, foreboding, and chilly character.

Also, Nevill knows how to craft endings. That's right, he doesn't just write them but shapes them. The House of Small Shadows is an exciting slow burn but those last 50 pages or so is like a roller coaster free fall. I was freaking out, trying to figure out what was going on. It was elegant chaos. The narrative did break apart but was enhanced by the chaotic activity.

I cannot wait to read more of his books!

Bradley says

Honestly, there are a number of really nice things about this novel, mostly in the descriptions and a few fairly early-on reveals, such as the rotting beehive, that got to me. Other good things were the all out gorefest perfectly reminiscent of all the 80's B-Movie extravaganzas, including all the cheese, all the neatly wrapped-up characters in overblown situations brought together with even more convenient reveals until we get a nice gore-strewn bowl made of intestines, or in this case, pre 1950's dresses and glassy eyes.

On the negative side of the review, it's all exactly as I just said. B-Movie extravaganza. And a bad B-Movie, too. It's all too pat and all the emotions I'm supposed to feel are hardly telegraphed to me, they're told to me. I also had a problem with Catherine. All the conceits and the creepy past and her mental problems might be a staple of such horrors, a nice counterpoint to the outside horror she finds herself, but how it was pulled off just didn't seem right to me. I never really connected with her at any point. It was like she was overacting for the screen and I should have been laughing at her performance before she got sucked into the Ghoulies set, but no, there was way too much seriousness and intent to be serious all around me. It was both a downer and it was out of sync.

Maybe others who haven't watched nearly as much truly horrible horror movies as me might get something more out of this novel, or perhaps I'm just being too critical, because I thought the truly bizarre aspects were pretty fun. I just wish I could have fallen into the true *horror* of it, along with Catherine, more.

Who knows, this might actually be a decent extremely low-budget movie... some day.

Sarah says

This was a highly creepy book and I will never look at dolls and puppets quite the same way. I've never found myself prone to nightmares after horror books/movies, but last night, as I was going to sleep, I started thinking of this... and the creepy figure crouched at the foot of Catherine's bed. Needless to say, my eyes popped open and I quickly decided to think about something else :)

There are things that are predictable in this and things that were less so, but overall it was just so incredibly creepy that even the more predictable things didn't bother me.

This is a horror book that is all psychological and no gore. Just the way I like them.

Paul says

Utterly, totally bizarre and horrific novel. Ligotti-esque in vibe and feel, there are a handful of images in this book that won't leave me.

Rachel says

Creepy, bizarre, atmospheric, nightmareish... Really loved it.

Matt says

I like Adam Neville - a lot - but "House of Small Shadows" was a just a major disappointment all around. I couldn't stand Catherine from the get go: whiny, desperate and not a strong female character. You can also see how everything ends from the first time she walks in Red House. The only interesting thing described in the book is the WW1 dioramas - super weird and slightly disturbing. At least in my head they were. Adam is a master of setting up creepy situations and making you feel like you are wrapped in dread, but House of Small Shadows needs a remodel.

PS - If you are interested in Adam Neville, I suggest starting with The Ritual.

Maxine (Booklover Catlady) says

Wow! Gothic creepiness at its best. This book still has me thinking about it a week after reading it. This is an atmospheric, dark and delectable horror where Nevill lets your imagination fill in blank spaces. The stuff of nightmares.

Don't expect fast paced blood, gore and splatter. That's not what this style of horror delivers. In the subtleties are the darkest of things. A book that astounded me with its ability to yet again put me IN the book, Nevill does that to me everyone. I feel so close. Too close for comfort.

Take one dark, rambling ancient mansion. Toss in some erratic, bizarre, secretive and disturbing residents. Add creepy dolls, toys, scenes and marionettes and then send in a beautiful art valuer, thinking she's simply cataloguing bizarre and rare items left over from the legacy and mind of an artist long dead. What do you get? Terror. The nightmares of childhood reappearing.

Dolls that move? Or did they? Are you going mad in this house? Secrets so diabolical and evil. Then the reveals at the end that blows the whole flipping book apart (and my mind). I re-read reveal scenes, unbelieving, my mind grasping. Holy scary books batman!

This book crept up on me at page one and sunk its dark claws into me refusing to let me go, even now. I want to see this made into a movie so much. I could see a sequel too.

Some descriptive visual scenes made me want to turn my head but morbid fascination had me look on in fear and disgust. Other moments had hairs on my arms standing on end, wanting to yell "it's behind you!" Not a book to rush one single bit. Don't rush it, don't skip a single eerie word.

This book takes taxidermy to a whole new level by the way! Holy stuffed creatures!

I believe you either "get" Adam Nevill's writing and have him on horror genius pedestal or...well you just don't get it. I recommend this book highly and my best advice is to read with no expectations on a dark and stormy night, with candles, a few cats and a glass of port. Perfect!

5 stars from me. I'm officially quite possibly Adam's number one fan, however if he ever wrote something crap I'd be honest. I owe that to those who read my reviews. If you don't like extreme gory horror but would like to taste test something - this is perfect!

I read a paperback copy of this book that I own. All review opinions are my own and totally unbiased.

Kimberly says

4.5 stars, rounded up!

In House of Small Shadows, Adam Nevill has--what I consider to be--absolutely perfect pacing. The creepiness and "wrongness" confronted by our main character, Catherine, builds up steadily throughout the entire novel. We are not bombarded with too much information at once, just enough to positively leave you salivating for more. A book like this keeps your interest, and makes it near impossible for you to find "the right place" to stop reading for the night. I don't mind saying that I've lost a lot of sleep over this book--and it was well worth it!

Nevill isn't an author to slam you in the face with an obvious outcome. He writes with the intention of making his audience THINK and draw some of the connections on their own before moving on to the next scene of subtle revelations. Don't get me wrong here, when things hit you and you begin to understand the extent of this horrific book, they SLAM into you with the almost physical sense of a punch to the gut!

There wasn't anything that I could really find fault with in this novel, unless you count the sleepless nights. :)

Highly recommended!

Jason says

5 Stars

Adam Nevill has become my favorite horror author over the last several years. He was always second to the wonderful Catherine Kiernan who just does not write enough these days. (She was my former favorite and still would be if she put out new material.) Those of you not familiar with Nevill, he is a talent not to be missed. Like most of the British horror these days, Nevill is more concerned with the buildup, the suspension, and the atmosphere over our American quick scares and gory action. His novels have literary value and can sit on the same shelves with the great authors of fiction.

House of Small Shadows is a book that is all about the atmosphere, the suspense, and the tension as it builds. There is a great deal of things lurking in the shadows, things left unsaid, and things that are not what they appear to be. I loved the world building that Nevill puts into this one and the Red House is simply amazing. I devoured this book in a day and was disappointed when it was over. There are plenty of scares and jumps to satisfy most horror readers but it mostly works through the story and the way that it makes you think.

Adam Nevill write with a wonderful literary prose:

“Where did fear end and wonder begin?

If she had not been inside the house she suspected she would be swept upwards, or extinguished by a brief awareness that she was trapped on a planet that didn't matter to anything up there. Extinction seemed to be a better option than awareness.

She felt like a child again. An inexplicable regression. Would other people feel the same way here? Would they cope and handle themselves and know what to do and say, or would they wait fretting and alone in a forgotten corner?”

“The decision to leave quelled her anxiety, as if a valve had suddenly opened to release a huge pressure, and its venting was close to bliss. All here was unhealthy, toxic. Was damaged and infectious. It was a bad place. Some places just were. She'd long suspected it. Here was confirmation. The Red House had corrupted then killed the village. The house and village had expired and should be buried, but clung on. And they'd seeped into her like a poison.”

This book is a slow burner that not only builds up the tension as the story progresses, it also paints a woman's descent into madness. Catherine is a wonderful damaged protagonist that was easy to identify with and her back story made her much more. She easily carries the weight of this story and I found myself rooting for her the whole time.

If you have not read an Adam Nevill novel and are a fan of the horror genre than do yourself a favor and put him next on your list to read. He is an author not to be missed. House of Small Shadows would be a great starting point for new readers as he touches on all the areas that make him a gifted writer of the macabre. This is a fast paced atmospheric story that does not fill in all the details. It is awesome!!!

Latasha says

This one took a while to get into. We do get some of the awesome scary as hell imagery that I've come to expect from Adam Neville but it wasn't enough for me to rate this higher than 3 stars. The ending is bat shit crazy and a little messy. I didn't hate this one but it isn't his best, either. I will continue to read more by him, though.

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

In the end the book wasn't a hit for me. It started out interesting; I wanted to know the mystery with the house. Then the story goes weird and confusing. And suddenly I turned the last page and the book was over. And I felt let down. It was never ever scary, if stuffed animals creep you out, then perhaps this book will scare you. But for me it felt just like a waste of time, I could have read something much better than this book.
