



The Pet

Charles L. Grant

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Teenagers are being slaughtered by the Howler, a serial killer who stops in small towns just long enough to kill, just long enough to tear apart a family and a community. When he strikes in Ashford, the town reacts-setting limits on teens' activities, monitoring who goes where-and parents become paranoid.

Seventeen-year-old Don Boyd doesn't need the grief. He's already under siege-he's got family trouble, girl trouble, trouble with his high school classes and trouble with the jocks who rule the school. Surely the Howler will kill someone else, somewhere else, and then Don can go back to trying to escape notice.

But the Howler likes Ashford. And one frosty autumn night, the Howler chooses Don as his next victim. The attack is swift-but it doesn't go as planned. Suddenly the killer and the boy are surrounded by an unnatural mist, by green fire, by the sound of iron striking iron.

And then the real horror begins.

The Pet Details

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From Reader Review The Pet for online ebook

Kristen says

I had never heard of Charles L. Grant, and I have been reading horror for a long time. I came across this book when I googled "Top 100 Horror Books" and found a list, which I printed up with the hopes that it would introduce me to new authors. I picked this book of the list and am now questioning the author of the list's credibility.

First off, this is horror decaf, no where did I read that this was a young adult novel, and with the praise from Steven King and Whitley Strieber on the cover I assumed it was a regular horror novel. Now granted the picture of the horse on the cover had me leery, but I figured "The headless horseman rode a big nasty horse, what the heck." This is 100% a youth novel, probably most enjoyed by the 12-15 year old crew, not quite ready for the jump into King territory but still interested in darker reading. The gore is minimal, the profanity is mild, and though sex is discussed... it's typical teen banter about boobs and such.

Here's the short synopsis: Don is 17 and having a rough time at life in general, his Dad is the principle at his high school so he is constantly tormented, picked on and beat up by the big stereotypical jocks. Don's Mom is an art teacher who keeps herself busy doing anything other than being at home to be a mom. Don spends most of his time sitting in his room talking to pictures and models of animals he has. Then a serial killer comes to town and Don realizes that sometimes wishes do come true... just not in the way you expected.

This story has been done before a thousand times over... it's the tale of someone acquiring a supernatural protector who's a bit too protective and slightly on the homicidal side. Graham Masterton did a better job with this story in his book "Spirit." If you have never read a horror book, or watched a horror movie then you might manage to be impressed with this tale. Unfortunately, the characters are straight high school stereotypes, the adults are almost buffoonish, actions and reactions to things are completely unnatural, and the plot has gaping holes in it.

I know that people seem to love this book, but for the life of me I can't figure out why. There is nothing new here, it was far from exciting, it wasn't scary, gory, or really even that much fun. The main character - Don, is a whiny, angst-filled teen who comes across as a bit of a temperamental moron. I mean if I knew that anyone who upset me stood the chance of being trampled to death, then I think I might keep from raging about those that I love over stupid things... like the fact that they had to go home before curfew.

The biggest problem that I had was that our big nasty protector... is a horse. Granted he's a big horse... but really, horses don't scare me. In fact I find them to be rather pretty and lovable. Now a panther I could see, or a wolf or something... but not a horse. I had a lot of trouble buying into the idea of a horse traipsing about town and trampling people... even if he is a spirit horse or whatever he was (never explained so don't hold your breath on that one).

The biggest problem with the book isn't the horse... it's that this is basically a compilation of horror cliché after horror cliché with very little real meat in between our clichés. Every scene is something you've either seen or read before, lashed together by paper thin stereotypes serving as our characters. Even the ending is a huge letdown, no big bang, no coup-de-gras, no body strewn battle ground... it's just an easily put away and wrapped up ending like a toy in a box.

As a horror reader I like to latch onto a character and want to root for them, I want to worry about them, and

I want to bite my nails when they are in trouble... there was no one in here that the reader can even remotely care about much less want to root for. Oh sure you'll find someone, Tracey perhaps, but you'll pick them by default because there really isn't anyone here for the reader to care about.

Now if you are 12 and want to read a slightly scary book with not too much gore and horses included then this should be right up your alley. If you're 30 like me, and a war hardened horror reader, buy this for your 12 year old as an intro, but don't bother reading it yourself.

Kimberly says

4.5 stars, rounded up!

Grant is back with his usual style in his novel, THE PET. As is usually the case, his novels start out very slowly, the atmosphere and characters being gradually established. Once you get past the initial phase, however, the tension begins to tighten up so much so that I felt that if "someone or something" didn't snap soon, I was going to! This story had a very ominous, surreal feel throughout, that I really enjoyed. Once again, I felt that the ending was absolutely perfect in conjunction with the characters personalities and motivations. Grant has a quiet style of horror in his writing that once you get into, you can't pull yourself away from. It's time for me to start hunting down more of novels....

Recommended!

Glenn says

Four stars for the atmosphere that Grant conjures up in this weird story of manifestation and teen angst. At times his prose trips over itself and gets in the way of the story telling but if you can get past that (and some similarly odd story choices) you're in for a fun slice of 80s weirdness.

Jon Recluse says

An incredible novel by the Master of Quiet Horror. Grant's signature style, keen sense of atmosphere and talent for creating scenes of subtle horror that will linger with you long after you've finished reading are in fine form here. The characterization is dead on and the pacing is pitch perfect. Grant was one of the best of his generation and worthy of respect.

Kristopher Triana says

An excellent example of original horror, with well-developed characters, genuine terror and an ending you won't see coming. Highly recommend this one. I will be devouring more of Grant's work, for sure. Isn't it time you got yourself a PET?

Rebecca McNutt says

This book seemed like it would be creepy and original, but it was choppy, boring and easily predictable. Right away I knew what kind of thing was going to happen, but I honestly didn't care about the lives of the generic characters.

Kit★ says

I've heard that this author was one that was great in the genre, so when I saw this book on one of my Goodwill trips last year (or earlier this year, I don't remember) I picked it up. Never read him before, so I didn't have any idea what to expect. Truth be told though, it didn't scare me at all. In fact, for the first half of the story or so, I didn't even know what the heck was going on. I didn't like the main character, Don. At first I did, but then he turned out to be a whiner really, and all jealous and weird and stuff. Every little thing that happened in his life that wasn't good, he went all emo. I wanted to root for him, but then every time something good would happen for him, he'd go and do something stupid and mess it up, then get all mad about it. I don't know. Really I wasn't that into it for that first half. But then in the second half it started picking up, 'terrifying' things started happening in the town, people started getting killed, and my interest was a little more piqued. But then it kinda fizzled, I don't know. It wasn't bad though, when the action was going on, chases, fights, the horse trampling people, it was good. But the main character just irritated me I think. His parents weren't very sympathetic characters either, both of them relegating Don to some back burner of importance in their lives, never listening to him, or seeming to care much. But I definitely could picture this much better in my head as a movie. When I thought of it in movie terms, it made a lot more sense, and was easier to stay focused on. Wow, I'm not saying what I really wanted to say in this review very well at all... Maybe I'll come back later and add to it. It wasn't a bad story though at all, don't get me wrong. It just didn't amaze me either. I am still interested in checking out more by this author though, and will be on the lookout for more. Just because this one didn't wow me doesn't mean I won't find one that does.

Kathryn says

Ugh. AWFUL book. Usually these kinds of stories end up being nothing more than a kind of pitiful wish-fulfillment for the author (picked-on high-schooler somehow awakens a demon in the shape of a huge black horse, which proceeds to messily kill anyone it sees as a threat to the main character). But this was worse. I absolutely HATED every one of the characters. Flat, lifeless, useless people, all of them. And the main character was the worst. I'm sure I was supposed to sympathize with his outsider status, but I ended up just wishing he would get over himself.

The book also had the standard "The End...or IS it?" ending, but the only nightmares that brought up was the idea that there could be a sequel to this piece of trash. Bleck. Argh! Pleh. Words fail me.

If I sound bitter, it's because I saw an ad for this book when I was a lonely, outsider high-schooler, but couldn't track down a copy. I found it years later and thought I'd finally tracked down a rare treasure. Silly me...

Traummachine says

2.5 stars:

I read several good reviews of this, about it being one of Grant's best works, and a great horror novel. So I picked it up eagerly, looking forward to his trademark nightmarish building of tension. But at the beginning of the novel it's revealed that *The Howler* is a werewolf, and since I usually hate werewolf tales, I put it down again. This was several years ago, which is why I haven't read any Grant in a long time despite my love of his style.

Fortunately, I was wrong -- the werewolf is actually just a way to get the ball rolling. Instead, the story's really about a boy who has problems in school, at home, etc. It's about teenage angst, broken families, and insecurities. These blossom into a completely different tale than I expected, and it was definitely supernatural, and definitely horror...at least in parts it was. Sadly, the book never really kept any tension for me. Grant's style and dreamy horror narratives were just not there in this book.

So I've realized that Grant was pretty hit and miss, and it makes me sad. *Night Songs*, *The Black Carousel*, and *The Orchard* are wonderful, REALLY good horror. But everything else has been disappointing, especially the novels. I'll keep reading him, in hopes I'll find some other gems, but I'm kinda sad about the inconsistency. He may have been off more than on (or my luck might be bad in what I've picked), but when he was on he was amazing.

Pam Baddeley says

I'm not convinced this book was written to be YA but it comes across that way because of the focus on the teenage protagonist, his schoolmates, parents etc. In theory, here was an interesting idea: teenage boy who feels put upon, with bullying from boys in the football team, and parents who belittle his ambition to be a veterinarian, retreats into a fantasy world which then turns into reality. His animal posters on the bedroom wall, which he views as friends and talks to, begin to take on a life of their own, as the horse in one fades out and a phantom horse begins to stalk those associated with him. He has found a protector, who turns out to be overprotective. Meanwhile, a nasty serial killer with delusions of being a werewolf has arrived in town and started killing kids.

Perhaps the story suffered from being stretched too thin over so many bases. We have the serial killer story which doesn't last long, the teenage angst thread running throughout which does get a bit wearing unfortunately, and the spectral horse plot. Plus the irresponsible and unpleasant behaviour of the boy's parents. The story did seem to sag a bit in the middle, and although the 'good guys' in the story, especially the girl he has a crush on - can't really be love given how he treats her - have more life to them - the girl is the most sympathetic character in the book - and in theory the reader should be concerned when they also start to be menaced, the overall effect, I'm afraid, is a 'so what'. Nasty people get stomped on so there isn't much to be concerned about, and the ending is rather a cliché. So only a 2-star rating.

Ben Loory says

"A modern story that fits right into the 1980s. A good book!"

-Washington Post Book World

if i ever get a blurb like that, remind me to kill myself.

this book is "well-written," on a sentence level, but just plain stupid. another strangely inexplicable entry onto the jones and newman 100 best horror list.

<http://home.comcast.net/~netaylor1/jo...>

Randolph says

Easily Grant's best novel. Perfectly captures teen angst even better than Carrie. Could have been set in Oxrun Station but it is not.

William Malmborg says

The Pet was my first venture outside of Charles L. Grants's Oxrun Station novels, and I must say, aside from a bit of a slow start, the book was spectacular and makes me want to seek out everything Grant has written. All the elements within it just felt so real, especially the inner struggles that the teen high school students faced. Ten years have passed since my days within such hallways and classrooms, yet several times I felt myself put back into those situations, my mind able to remember what it was like with great clarity once the sentences initiated such memories. I also was able to recall the mental anguish one faces as they try to prove to the world that they are an adult, yet still are viewed as a kid, and the fine line one must walk. The horror of the novel was perfectly handled as well, both it is real life 'this could happen' moments and its supernatural moments. The only thing that was lacking in my opinion was an explanation for why things were happening. How was this creature able to be a part of this world? Nothing was really discussed in this matter and if it was suggested or hinted at it was done in a way that didn't work because I completely missed it. Aside from that, however, this was an excellent read and one that every fan of horror should seek out.

Thomas says

When I first started down this road of reading all of Grant's horror fiction (just two months ago now), I had

initially just wanted to read what other readers determined to be his best work. The Pet was one of the books that had the highest ratings and praise, so I've been looking forward to reading this novel.

The story is a good one, and it's pretty different from Grant's previous novels. For one, the protagonist of the story is hard to pin down. Don is a teenager who's being unfairly singled out by his teachers, parents, and classmates, enough so that he starts fantasizing about revenge. His fantasies begin to take form in reality, though not necessarily due to his own actions. He starts off as being a sympathetic character, but then he starts seeing persecution from all angles, even when it's not there, and he slowly shifts over to being an unsympathetic character, but then he regrets what he's wrought, so he becomes sympathetic again. . . . It jumps back and forth in this style, so it's hard to get a handle on the character. Are we supposed to care about him, or is he just another whiny teenager?

This isn't a criticism, necessarily; Stephen King did the same with Arnie Cunningham in Christine, to good effect, but where Arnie wound up just being one of the antagonists, Don is someone dealing with something out of his control. I actually found Don to be a more complex character than what Grant created in his previous novels. It was just difficult to figure out where the heart of the story was, since it was difficult to pin down who the protagonist really was. I would have bet that Tracey, Don's romantic interest in the story, was the one, but the focus of the story remained with Don more than anyone else.

Grant drops his atmospheric style with this novel, like he also did with Stunts (and Night Songs and The Tea Party), making me wonder if he intended for his non-Oxrun books to be more traditional horror stories. Even though the story is less atmospheric than his Oxrun Station books, there are still bits and pieces of that style peppered throughout the book:

"He liked the autumn nights, the way the air felt like thin ice on a pond, crisp and clean and ready to shatter as soon as you touched it. . . ."

And he continues to adeptly draw a vivid scene with as few words as possible. His settings are so succinctly, completely described that it makes me jealous.

I can see why this is considered to be Grant's best work (based on what I've read so far, at least). It has a good pace and plot, combines his atmosphere (such as it is) with a more traditional story, and it's engaging. The menace works well, and Grant does a good job of capturing the wavering Don feels between wanting revenge and wanting to regain control of it. I can't say for certain if I would have been able to appreciate it as well without having read all of his other fiction up to this point, though.

Kevin Lucia says

As usual - Goodreads reviews know NOTHING. Fabulous novel. Classic horror novel. And to all those reviewers who criticized his characterization of teenagers as being shallow and callous: HELLO? I teach them, work with them on a daily basis. There are good ones....and BAD ones. I'd Grant - as always - nailed this one perfectly...
