



# The Sorrow King

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## **The Sorrow King** Andersen Prunty

The papers call it “The Suicide Virus.” The teenagers of Gethsemane, Ohio, are killing themselves at an alarming rate.

Steven Wrigley is trying to survive his senior year of high school, still reeling from the death of his mother and adjusting to life with his father. Along the way, he meets a girl who becomes another kind of obsession: Elise Devon.

Elise’s secrets keep her distanced from everyone. She has a special place she calls the Obscura. She goes there when she is depressed or angry. The Obscura makes her feel like nothing she’s ever felt before. When she loses herself to the Obscura, she fears she also gives herself to something much darker, something much more powerful. Something calling itself the Sorrow King.

Who is the Sorrow King?

He is carved from wood and bone.

He smells like wax, dead leaves, and memories.

He travels by moonlight and drinks the sorrow of others.

Can love exact vengeance on a monster made from madness, depression, and misery? Or will the Sorrow King bleed the town dry before satiating himself and moving on?

## **The Sorrow King Details**

Date : Published April 26th 2011 by Grindhouse Press (first published June 2009)

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Author : Andersen Prunty

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Genre : Horror, Bizarro Fiction, Fantasy, Fiction

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# From Reader Review The Sorrow King for online ebook

## Dustin Reade says

For a Prunty book, this one was pretty damned intense. I mean, his writing is unlike anyone else who has ever played with a pen or typer, and his stories are original, often quite funny, and always entertaining. And while they are always a bit dark, this one was like a night with no stars.

Prunty offers us real horror, complete with a seemingly unstoppable monster/demon-thing, and a death-mechanism that is unspeakable: teen suicide.

For, as one of the characters puts it in the novel: "What could be worse than children killing themselves?"

That's not a direct quote, but it is close, and sums up the feeling nicely. The novel is appropriately dark, morose, with only the faintest tricklings of hope here and there. He manages to plunge the reader headfirst into a slowly unfolding nightmare ten-times better than most horror novels out there. Here. Whatever.

The point is, if you like dark horror. If you like a bit of surrealism with your fiction. If you like novels just a little too fucked up to recommend to your friends.

Then I recommend you read this book. Besides, the cover art alone should've sold you on it.

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## Dan Schwent says

The town of Gethsemane, Ohio, is rocked by a string of suicides that some are calling The Suicide Virus. Meanwhile, troubled young teenager Steven Wrigley meets the girl of his dreams. But does his new lady love have some sort of connection to the suicide plague?

Some people seem to be afraid of the bizarro genre, thinking it's full of things like talking penises running for president, super heroes wielding magical dildos, people having sex with fruit, and pieces of furniture having sex with one another. While this is certainly true in some cases, it is not always the case. I like to think of the bizarro as writers writing what they feel like without the constraints of a conventional publisher. This book is a perfect example.

The Sorrow King is a chilling tale of a demon-like creature, the Sorrow King, that drives teenagers to commit suicide so that it can feed on their misery and the misery their deaths cause. Andersen Prunty does a great job maintaining a creepy mood throughout as the Sorrow King tempts his victims. Up until a huge twist near the end, I could easily see the Sorrow King coming from a major publishing house. Then came the twist, which I couldn't see any major publishing house putting out. I'm not going to divulge any more plot information at this time. I already feel like the back cover gives away a little too much.

The characters of Steven and his father are very well done. I liked the interplay between them as it nicely summed up their relationship, more like friends than father and son. The character of Elise could have used a bit more developing but I bought Steven falling for her so fast. After all, I was a hormone-driven teenage boy once.

Andersen Prunty's writing continues to impress me. I enjoyed Zerostrata quite a bit and, while it's a completely different kind of book, I enjoyed The Sorrow King even more. I almost wish I would have saved it until Halloween.

To sum things up, The Sorrow King is one the best bizarro books I've read so far and I recommend it to all

the Bizarro-curious (or Bi-curious, as Steve Lowe calls them) readers out there.

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### **Nick Cato says**

High school senior Steven lives in the small Ohio town of Gethsemane with his widowed father, Connor. Still dealing with the death of his mother 2 years prior, a rash of teenage-suicides hits the town, adding more pressure to both Steven and Connor's lives. To clear his mind, Steven begins taking long walks late at night. One night he spots a young redhead girl walking alone. He becomes obsessed with her, and even stalks her around school until he discovers her name (Elise). When he meets up with her on his next walk, she asks him why he's been watching her. A relationship is born, and so are more worries for Connor when Steven begins staying out until dawn every night.

Prunty's take on ghosts, the afterlife, and human fear is done in a refreshing manner...but it's the 3 main characters who kept me riveted from page one: Steven learns his girlfriend may have something to do with the suicides, adding to the regular problems he's facing as a HS senior; Elise eventually declares her love for Steven, but has too many secrets she's not willing to share. Their relationship comes to an abrupt halt as soon as it seems to get going, and whenever she comes into the story there's the sense that anything can and will happen. Connor spends his days working long hours at a bookstore and staying up late worrying if his son will fall victim to what the news is now calling the "Suicide Virus" (one scene at the high school graduation ceremony is quite disturbing). Connor is done in a way that puts him leaps and bounds above the stereotypical parent we usually see in genre novels.

With some slick prose, a great title villain, and a finale that brings Douglas Clegg's gruesome novel *THE ABANDONED* to mind, Prunty--while better known for his bizarro stories--proves he can write a solid, genuinely scary horror tale with the best of them. Horror fans DO NOT want to miss this.

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### **Jessi says**

I tried, but maybe this was just not my bag?

If we broke the elements of the story into parts I got most of them, there is a teenage boy who is lonely and a bit depressed, got it, there is a pretty girl with a secret, got it, there is a surge in teen suicide in the past few weeks, got it, there is a realm called the Obscura where you can feel power and happiness, but is also connected to cloud formation....

Yes what? I just could not for whatever reason get into the flow of this book and fully ..understand what the Obscura was and the dynamics in play. This book is 211 pages and it took me 2 weeks to finish, I just did not get into it all.

Also there were bugs, I do not do bugs, they creep me the fuck out. There is a character Mary in the Sorrow King who at one point hears a scuttle and turns to see a substantial spider run and hide behind a box. The

proper course of action is to not “try to ignore it”, that will not end well. My advice to Mary is a little more like this..

Spiders are not be trusted...ever

There is a story within the story that was cool, The Jackthief. It was very creepy. I like creepy and suspense, rather than out and out gross. Which was my issue with The Sorrow King just a bit too yucky for my tastes.

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## **mark monday says**

**DO NOT RUN FROM THIS BOOK'S LURID COVER!**

The Sorrow King is a real find. my only other experience with the author - the extremely goofy The Sex Beast of Scurvy Island - was not the best introduction to Prunty. the man is talented and the novel is unusually sensitive and moving. the imagery is unearthly. the writing is wry, lean, and clear-eyed. and the protagonists... heartbreaking. surpassingly so.

the story is one of classic horror. a sort of suicide virus is taking out the teens of Gethsemane, Ohio. moody teenager Steven flirts with his own depression. his father is a sensitive sort who has built up his so-called life as one of solitary contemplation. and then a troubled girl comes along, one who may be the link between the rash of suicides and a sinister supernatural presence with many names.

have you seen an obscure 80s horror film called Strange Behavior? if not, you should. it is also about a small town haunted by multiple deaths, and an offbeat but tender relationship between a father and son. the film has its moments of straight-up horror, but much of the tone is almost wistfully nostalgic. i was reminded of Strange Behavior while reading The Sorrow King, and i was reminded a bit of Twin Peaks as well - that same dreamy, at times surreally elegiac unearthliness. unlike Twin Peaks, The Sorrow King is not teeming with quirky characters. instead it has an almost underpopulated feel to it, a chamber piece of sorts, with three main characters and very little else in the way of supporting characters. we see the world through our three protagonists, and it is a very real world of sadness, lack of affect, and free-floating anomie, one where angst equals melodrama and is therefore skirted, where pathos equals mawkishness and is likewise avoided. the dialogue is wittily off-kilter but is anchored by the depth, delicacy, honesty, and offhand despair of the characterization. in the end, the novel is a distinctly *emotional* experience. it is also full of surprises, both within the story and with the narrative itself - surprises that are often unpleasant yet exciting in their execution. i appreciate Anderson's smarts and his unsentimentality in constructing his novel. although it led to a particularly painful, unexpected scene that left me genuinely upset.

one last thing: the novel portrays teenagers perfectly. well, certain sorts of teenagers - the moody ones, smart and self-absorbed and yearning and pitiless and awkward and melancholy. i remember the emotions on display, the casual cruelty, the equally casual tenderness, moving from nervous agitation to studied nonchalance, that feeling of being such a small player in life's strange pageant, that sense that - despite everyone saying the world will open up - that life after high school will just be a series of diminishing returns. the novel gets all of that without reducing its world to a BE Ellis level of predetermined nihilism. there are no false notes; the novel gets it right. i finished the last chapter and sighed, a thoughtful and sad and satisfied sigh.

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## Emily says

"His world had become a very strange place."

Grindhouse Books had a sale sometime last month (I think), and that was the first time I came across *The Sorrow King*. I saw that cover & immediately put it in my cart.

This book is grim as hell, and it's such an entertaining read. It opens so well, and it sets the tone for the rest of the story. It's a very unsettling story, and there were definitely a couple good creepy parts. *The Sorrow King* feels like fever dream in a lot of ways, and it's easy to get hooked on the story. If you enjoy dream horror, this is a good one to pick up.

I wish the book would have focused on the romance a bit less, but I understand why it was there. I found the family dynamic to be more interesting, and probably would have enjoyed more time there. Grief plays a major role in this book, and I thought that it was done well. It was easy to connect with the characters.

*The Sorrow King* was my introduction to Andersen Prunty. I know his other books are different, and I'm looking forward to reading more!

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## Steve Lowe says

To those who might read this review,

This is not Steve, this is his widow. Yes, that is correct. Steve is dead. His last wish, which he pinned to himself before he took his own life, was for me to post this review for him. I do so begrudgingly.

And I lay the blame for my beloved husband's death at your feet, Mr. Prunty. It was your book, *The Sorrow King* which drove him to this madness. Your skillfulness in capturing the mindset of downcast, suicidal teens and their daily angst so thoroughly depressed my husband that it sent him over the edge.

The depth given to your down-in-the-mouth main character, who I might also point out was named STEVEN, was so complete, and the sadness and depression of being a teenager again, experienced vicariously through this story, so intense, it was too much for my poor husband. Being from a smallish Midwestern town himself, he was intoxicated by your portrayal of a dying Gethsemane, Ohio, where the body count mounts as teens are driven to what appears to be a number of suicides. But then you piled on the awful, sinister truth of what was truly behind all of that sorrow and grief.

You, Mr. Prunty, you are the Sorrow King. I hope you feel the shame of a murderer, because that is what you are. You'll be hearing from my attorney soon.

Signed,  
The Grieving Widow of Steve Lowe

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## Bill says

*"Let strange things explain the strangeness."*

There is something rotten in the small town of Gethsemane. Lurking in the shadows. Driving the students of the local High School to suicide. Hunting. Feeding off the sorrow of the town and threatening to destroy anyone and anything that stands in its way. It's getting stronger. The bodies are starting to pile up.

A very well written and smart novel with sharp characterizations and a well thought out story line.

A solid 4+ Stars and highly recommended.

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## Kate says

Now that it's pitch black when I leave the comforts of my warm home to make the journey to the train to get me to my day job, I love to read horror stories in preparation of my favorite holiday, Halloween!

This one was one of the best modern horror stories I have read in a very long time (Since I won *The Place In Between*, to be exact). Andersen Prunty knows how to get into your head and make your deepest fears - rational or irrational; repressed or addressed - come to life. He does this eloquently well with the main characters of this story: Steve, Elise and Connor.

The Sorrow King himself is one of the creepiest creations (on par with *The Good Doctor*, I thought) so fans of psychological horror should certainly pick up a copy and read it this fall. It's intense, but it's also one of those stories that will stay with you for a very long time. I'm really glad I read it.

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## Katy says

**Book Info:** Genre: Dark Fiction Reading Level: While the characters would make it YA, the content makes it Adult

**Disclosure:** I received a free copy from Amazon on a sale and am happy to provide an honest review.

**Synopsis:** *"There are no happy endings in hell."*

The papers call it "The Suicide Virus." The teenagers of Gethsemane, Ohio, are killing themselves at an alarming rate.

Steven Wrigley is trying to survive his senior year of high school, still reeling from the death of his mother and adjusting to life with his father. While sleeping, Steven writes names in a notebook-- the names of dead teenagers before he can possibly know they're dead. These messages fill him with dread, clues to some mystery he must try to unravel. Along the way, he meets a girl who becomes another kind of obsession: Elise Devon.

Elise's secrets keep her distanced from everyone. She has a special place she calls the Obscura. She goes there when she is depressed or angry. The Obscura makes her feel like nothing she's ever felt before. She soon realizes the Obscura may be partially to blame for the suicides. When she loses herself to the Obscura, she fears she also gives herself to something much darker, something much more powerful. Something calling itself the Sorrow King.

*Who is the Sorrow King?* He is carved from wood and bone. He smells like wax, dead leaves, and memories. He travels by moonlight and drinks the sorrow of others. And, drunk from this sorrow, he must always create more.

Can love exact vengeance on a monster made from madness, depression, and misery? Or will the Sorrow King bleed the town dry before satiating himself and moving on?

**My Thoughts:** In a book that calls itself suspense or horror, there should be at least one moment where you are startled enough to voice an expletive out loud. There were a couple of those in this book. While it is very dark, I would not call it horror because of the ending, so I'm calling it Dark Fiction.

Prunty does a good job with characterization; you feel as if you really understand the characters in this book. There are plenty of twists and turns as well – you never know exactly what is going to happen next, except for a few instances in which some foreshadowing is employed. The plot moves smoothly while keeping the reader in the dark about the mystery behind the scenes. Fans of dark or bizarre fiction should enjoy this.

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## **Brad says**

I've wanted to read Andersen Prunty for a long time. Almost as long as I've been coming to *goodreads*. I mean, who wouldn't want to read books with titles like *The Overwhelming Urge*, *Jack and Mr. Grin*, *Zerostrata*, *The Sex Beast of Scurvy Island* and *Fuckness*? Maybe *Jack van Impe* and *Jimmy Swaggart*, but for the rest of us these titles are like lesbian porn smothered in chocolate. So bad for you in so many ways but impossible to avoid forever.

And I've finally done it. I just finished reading *The Sorrow King*, and I fear it is the doobie-ous gateway to my new Prunty as heroin addiction.

I have to admit that *The Sorrow King* was a lot less bizarro than I had imagined it would be. Even with its semen monster and a zombie fellatio dream, *The Sorrow King* is more mainstream horror than bizarro madness. But that works. And works well. Those bizarro moments flavour the mainstream horror in ways that are horrible (rather than horrifying), spicing up a genre that often bores my tastebuds.

I wasn't a huge fan of the ending, but I seriously loved this book right up to the last chapter or two. I loved the shift in narrators; I loved that none of the characters were safe; I loved the way Prunty was able to maintain suspense and even surprise me once or twice; I loved the father and son bits between Steven and Connor; and I loved that Prunty remembered and could convey what it was like to be a horny teenage boy about to have sex. We need more of that in the books being written today. More of that would go a long way to removing the shame our society is piling on sexuality.

Back to the *The Sorrow King*, though. It is an excellent piece of horror fiction, and its cinematic qualities scream for a chance to find its way onto HBO or the big screen.



I don't know how you can be so prolific, Andersen, and still achieve the quality of *The Sorrow King*, but if the rest of your books are anywhere near as good as this one, I am going to be appreciate your speed and offer my vein up to you as my horror pusher.

In other news, this was the first novel length book I've read on an e-Reader. I can't see it becoming my main format -- ever -- but I like its convenience. I will read something that way again.

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### **Janie C. says**

The small town of Gethsemane becomes the center of attention when many of its younger members commit suicide. The once quiet town now emits a presence of doom and eeriness, experienced primarily by a handful of characters. There is no doubt that this is a horror story. The author has a way of making his characters so relatable that, as a reader, I was instantly drawn into the ominous world of Gethsemane. Ghostly rumors, unconscious scribbles in a notebook and cloud formations take us further into the seemingly unreal atmosphere. Death knows no boundaries here. There is a monster to be confronted and conflicts to be resolved. What I enjoyed the most about this book was the very strong sense of emotion that runs like a current between the characters. Isolation, the confusion of relationships, and the bond between parent and child are explored and exposed, raw as nerves. I was moved by this book, and I am greatly looking forward to reading more by this author.

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### **Steve says**

After a recent slog through Stephen King's *Insomnia*, Anderson Prunty's *Sorrow King* came as a nice (but grim) surprise. The subject of teen suicide is a tough one. I've had friends, relatives, that have had to deal with such terrible occurrences. To see a life gone at such a young age is horrible. It turns life upside down. The subject matter is so painful that I wasn't even sure I wanted to read this book. But Prunty handles the subject with sensitivity, while still telling a horror story.

The town of Gethsemane, Ohio, is suffering through a wave of apparent teen suicides. The novel opens with the shocking death of a young boy who is only 13. The means of his death is pretty brutal, but Prunty is so good at portraying teens, that I kept reading. It's not like he's serving them up for deliberate massacre. He likes his characters, gives them depth, so when they do die, there is anguish over their loss -- which dovetails perfectly with the monster in the book. The "monster" is a murky nightmare creature, kind of an Ohio pal of Freddy Krueger. I'm no fan of Elm Street, so that was something of a hurdle for me. But the nature of the beast proved to be totally secondary. It's the characters, the small town setting, and the subject of teen death, that dominates. In addition, Prunty's prose is clean and economical, something bigger names have yet to get a handle on. One writer he reminds me of is Richard Laymon, but without the padding, and only a fraction of the horny teen stuff. I thought some of the end scenes faltered a bit, were a bit too Hollywood, maybe because Prunty had sort of painted himself into a corner. Nevertheless, the novel's resolution was well done, and left me feeling OK, even good, considering the subject matter. This guy's a pro, and deserves a wide audience.

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## **knig says**

The Sorrow King is my Bizarro baptism. I come to it laden with some prejudice: I am very particular about supernatural horror: I don't like the way it's a carte blanche for authors to spew up Mephistolean apnoea with no rhyme or reason. Unless its Dune or some totally otherly world where I don't mind raconteuring about the colour of nonsense. But, if its going to be Smallville in the US of A v. the Sorrow King, then I want it a la Shyamalan's 'the Sixth Sense' mode: everything joined up in rational and logical continuum despite the advent of the Dark Side.

This doesn't happen in the Sorrow King. At least, not sufficiently. Prunty's trifecta of characters (he doesn't seem too bothered about fleshing out secondary characters), namely Connor, his son Steven and the requisite love interest, Elise, take up equal space centre stage so effectively there isn't the one main character. Things happen to them which make no sense at all, unless I just accept a blanket pass for the supernatural to just wield its way hither and thither, another way of saying Prunty is too lazy to tie his themes together. For example, The Sorrow King can't kill Elise, she is the only one he needs/can't kill to achieve his 'ghoulish' mission. Well, why the hell is she the chosen one? Or should I just shut up and put up? Connor provides a conduit for the Sorrow King to materialise in his youth, yet its his son Steven who has to pay for this. First, why do either Steven OR Connor have to pay for letting the Genie out of the bottle? And if anyone has to pay, why should it be the son and not the father 'wot done it? See, that's the problem I have with supernatural horror: I just can't grin and bear it.

The Sorrow King has one more serious flaw which rankled even more than the above. Who exactly is the target audience for this book? Is it YA fiction? It seems like it: Connor and Elise are just seventeen and in high school. So, a lot of teenage angst and the associated storming, norming and forming that goes with it, and best appeals to spotty pubescent who, like the opening character Jeremy Levine in the sorrow King, are best preoccupied with should they beat themselves off in front of the TV or not. On the other hand, Steve and Connor engage in some of the wittiest and most cynical/sarcastic conversation etudes I've read in a long time|: a real treat of wordplay. But, not the type associated with a seventeen year old at all. Ah, the vicissitudes.....

So, I've got very mixed reactions to this....perhaps whatever the target audience, it simply isn't me. Just under three stars on this one.

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## **Trudi says**

### **OCTOBER COUNTRY 2013 - #1**

First of all, there are some fantastic four and five star reviews available that really sell the merits of this book's accomplishments in mood and story. But it's this review that most closely captures my reading experience of it.

What can I say? I like my horror to hit the lizard part of my brain, rather than the mysterious, atmospheric-laden kind that's literary and beautiful, yes, but misses my lizard brain altogether and goes right for the higher thinking part. I'm not opposed to literary horror -- some of it can be quite effective and evocative -- but it's not my *favorite*, it's not what I seek out, and it's not what I tend to remember. The best horror combines the elements of both, succeeding not only in a literary sense, but in attacking that primal part of our

brain that feels and reacts rather than thinks and considers.

In the Afterword to his collection of novellas *Full Dark, No Stars*, Stephen King writes:

I want to provoke an emotional, even visceral, reaction in my readers. Making them think *as they read* is not my deal...if the tale is good enough and the characters vivid enough, thinking will supplant emotion [only] when the tale has been told and the book set aside.

As a reader of horror, that's the experience I'm seeking first and foremost. I want to be made to *feel* on an instinctual level of 'fight or flight'. The cerebral stuff is for another time and place.

Aspects of *The Sorrow King* tickled my lizard brain, but like Elise's time spent in the *Obscura*, or Steven's long midnight walks, it's more a tale constructed out of dreams and moods, colors and sounds. Don't get me wrong -- things really do happen, frightening things accompanied by disturbing imagery -- I just feel like I spent too much time in my head while reading this one, and not enough time looking over my shoulder for the monster creeping up behind me.

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