



Help for the Haunted

John Searles

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It begins with a call in the middle of snowy February evening. Lying in her bed, young Sylvie Mason overhears her parents on the phone across the hall. This is not the first late-night call they have received, since her mother and father have an uncommon occupation, helping "haunted souls" find peace. And yet, something in Sylvie senses that this call is different than the rest, especially when they are lured to the old church on the outskirts of town. Once there, her parents disappear, one after the other, behind the church's red door, leaving Sylvie alone in the car. Not long after, she drifts off to sleep only to wake to the sound of gunfire.

Nearly a year later, we meet Sylvie again struggling with the loss of her parents, and living in the care of her older sister, who may be to blame for what happened the previous winter.

As the story moves back and forth in time, through the years leading up to the crime and the months following, the ever inquisitive and tender-hearted Sylvie pursues the mystery, moving closer to the knowledge of what occurred that night, as she comes to terms with her family's past and uncovers secrets that have haunted them for years.

Help for the Haunted Details

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Author : John Searles

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From Reader Review Help for the Haunted for online ebook

Biblioblond says

I was extremely intrigued by the premise of this novel; I thought it would make for a perfect spooky book to read around Halloween. In the end, I struggled through it only to be bitterly disappointed by an implausible conclusion. The beginning was spooky and well written enough to hook me but then after that the moments of interest were few and far between (the doll moving around, the wooden horses being broken as well as the descriptions of Abigail). Although I liked the main character of Sylvie, the secondary characters and her relationship with them seemed flat and unbelievable (with the exception of Abigail). Despite struggling through the bulk of the novel, I was determined to make it to the end (so good was the hook from the first chapter). In suspense novels, there are surprise endings that leave the reader reveling in their brilliance while there are surprise endings that leave the reader thinking "What the ...??" This novel's ending was the latter. The conclusion was albeit a complete surprise but that neither seemed clever nor plausible. It left me feeling bitterly disappointed that I had invested so much of my time in this novel. I gave this book two stars for its interesting premise and the intriguing characters of Sylvie and Abigail. I was wishing that it could have been so much more...

Allie says

Outstanding, suspenseful, unique. One of the best books I've read this year.

Full review:

I loved this book so much. I had a hard time tearing myself away and wish I had had the sense to start this on a weekend so I didn't have to! Searles has created a thoroughly sympathetic heroine in Sylvie. Her (his) voice is authentic and believable as a teenager in a very unusual home situation. Every element of the plot is revealed in exactly the right place. The characters are all complex and how I felt about some of them at the beginning (very strongly), I felt very strongly in a completely different way at the end. I rarely see this in books and I was fascinated as things were revealed that made me change my mind. In short, Help for the Haunted simply blew me away. It's the best book I've read so far this year. I will be purchasing this for my library and recommending it to fans of Chris Bojalian, Christopher Buehlman and anyone who enjoys a well-written, suspenseful and emotional story. Outstanding.

SPOILER ALERT

P.S. And OMG, she-who-shall-not-be-named in her cage with that sign on it? SOOO creepy. A+++

Ami says

I enjoyed the story and the main character. The narrative--a teenage girl struggling to deal with the death of her parents, who were sort of ghost hunters/conductors of exorcisms/spirit guides. The book actually isn't

very clear what the parents do, which is my biggest complaint. Sometimes the parents are just praying over people who have demons inside. Sometimes they are retrieving haunted items? There are definitely some encounters with angry ghosts? I wanted more descriptions of what the parents did exactly, and what the stories of hauntings were. In DETAIL.

The older sister is clearly supposed to be an unlikeable character, but she was so unlikeable I found it hard to read scenes with her in them. And the younger sister is so passive about so many aspects of her life. I wanted to reach into the book and shake the both of them as hard as possible.

Recommended if you want an engrossing novel that doesn't *quite* deliver on all its early promises, but has such a forward-propelled plot that you kind of don't care.

Delee says

Diabolical forces are formidable. These forces are eternal, and they exist today. The fairy tale is true. The devil exists. God exists. And for us, as people, our very destiny hinges upon which one we elect to follow.
Ed Warren

I didn't know a lot about HELP FOR THE HAUNTED going in-except that it had very high ratings on Goodreads...but I somehow had the feeling- after reading the description, that the parents of the main character were based on The Warrens- involved in such cases as "The Lutz's" Amityville Horror, "The Snedeker House"- The Haunting in Connecticut, and "The Perron Family"- The Conjuring.

and the further I got into reading it, I was sure I was right...

I love being right...

February 1989- The novel starts on a snowy night, when 13-year-old Sylvie Mason's parents are woken up by a phone call from their other daughter- Rose (jr.)- asking them to meet her at an old church. Sylvester and Rose Mason are used to strange phone calls in the middle of the night...they are experts in the paranormal, but this phone call will be their last- after packing up Sylvie and heading to the destination they are gunned down inside the church, and young traumatized Sylvie is the only witness.

One year later, Sylvie -under the care of her older sister Rose- is still dealing with police investigations. Who killed their parents and why? Sylvie is determined to find out the truth. The book moves back and forth in time as Sylvie tries to piece together what really happened that horrible night.

HELP FOR THE HAUNTED by John Searles is a wonderful, sometimes creepy read- especially for fans of the paranormal.

Robin says

Creepy, disturbing, and compelling, with gothic overtones and well-drawn characters. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend this to older teens. Definitely one of my favorite suspense novels of the year. It would also make a terrific movie.

Karin Slaughter says

In addition to being adorable, John is a really engaging and skillful writer. I have always been a fan but this latest one was a real treasure to read. The quality of the writing is just amazing. Some of the phrases still stick with me, which is always what you want with a good book.

Also, of note, I recently found out that John's dad was a long-haul truck driver, and John used to ride along with him and read books, which makes me respect John even more because I get really car sick and would've puked my way across the country.

This is what audio books are for.

Neil says

Help for the Haunted is an extraordinary book that defies categorization. It revolves around the murder of Sylvie Mason's parents and with an elegant construction takes place both in the present and through a series of flashbacks that bit by bit reveal all the mysteries surrounding the Masons and their lives.

The first person narrative voice of Sylvie is marvellously realized as an intelligent, sensitive and deeply troubled teenage girl, not surprising considering her upbringing and the fact that she was the only witness to her parents' killing. They had been ambitious members of the paranormal community, paid to deal with hauntings and possessions and increasingly prominent on the supernatural lecture trail with a basement full of spooky souvenirs and possessions including a very scary rag doll confined to a locked cage.

Almost every object and character in the book have their own air of menace and nothing and no one is entirely what they seem. The atmosphere is beautifully drawn and the air of danger and menace as Sylvie gets closer to the truth is beautifully realized.

Somewhat to my surprise (I am about as far away from being a teenage girl as you can get) I loved this book from the very first page. Read it, you'll be glad you did.

Carol says

Do you believe in haunted souls? No? You might just change your mind after reading this eerie, tension filled account of the Masons. Somewhat evangelistic, The Masons are out to save tortured beings much to the perplexity of one daughter and the questioning of the other. Sylvie, the daughter who wants to believe

and hope, life is shattered one icy evening when she is dragged along with her parents to church where a reconciliation is to take place between her parents and her sister Rose. A gunshot rings out and Sylvie's life is changed forever. Mine has been a bit too! Slow, creepy, with a gothic mood, this psychological head game builds to an interesting climax.

My sincere thanks to William Morrow Publishing for providing an e-galley of *Help for the Haunted* to be published September 2013

Ruth Turner says

This book was just an okay read for me.

My interest was caught at the beginning, but the more I read the less it intrigued me.

It's well written and the characters are interesting, but I found the story dragged at times.

The ending was disappointing and seemed contrived, almost as though the author didn't quite know how to end it.

I finished the last page and it was kind of...Huh?...So that's it? Disappointing.

Clarice says

"Help for the Haunted" started out as a real page turner with great story telling and excellent character development. Then at about the 90% mark, it just fell apart, and a book that was a 4-star read for me until then turned into a 1-star read. That really weak finish just sucked all the awesome out of the first 90% of the book and made it just an "OK" 2-star read for me overall.

SPOILERS BELOW

Having a new character pop up near the end of the book to be revealed as the murderer is lame enough, but Searles just didn't seem to know how to "end" the story. After the murderer was revealed, the writing just meandered. The struggle/fight between Frankie and Sylvie in the basement was not just unrealistic - it was ridiculous. Then we get detail after boring detail regarding what happened to Sylvie after she was "rescued". It was the sort of "happily ever after" information a reader would naturally be interested in, but somehow Searles, who kept me on the edge of my seat the first 90% of the book, managed to make the ending drag.

Donnelle says

This book is pretty much impossible to fit under the umbrella of just one genre, as it is alternately a paranormal quasi-thriller (that both debunks and lightly supports some aspects of the goings-on in the mystical realm); a murder mystery; a character study of a young girl finding answers and her way in the world; a cautionary tale of what can happen when one has too much or too little faith; a story where one person's short-sighted, selfish vision for the future has disastrous consequences; and a drama about a

controversial family whose extraordinary professional adventures mask a deep, all-encompassing sadness and dysfunction.

So, there's a lot going on, and matters are not helped by the fact that the narrative is not linear - one second, we're in the present day, the next, Sylvie is recounting events that happened years before, and then a month before, and then back to the present day, and characters pop into the story and then disappear for a long while. In short, the murky-factor in this one is high; it does take some patience to get through.

While one is slogging through everything, there are some paranormal elements that show up, and they are interesting and even veer into eerie territory, but they are far from scary (in my view). The murder mystery is intriguing, and that's largely what kept me reading until the end: Mr. Searles did a good job of making sure that readers cannot guess the culprit's identity. However, I have to say that the revelation of just who that person was didn't come out of nowhere, per se, but I don't feel as though enough of a foundation was laid that made the ending feel earned - there were basically just a couple of hints spaced through a couple of hundred of pages, and then...there it was. And then, after one scene, it was all wrapped up.

On the plus side, Sylvie was a very sympathetic character - the good daughter who always obeyed, made good grades, and put up with her overbearing, misfit older sister. She's the one that is followed throughout the story, as she struggled with the aftermath of the murder, the stigma that came part and parcel with her parents' profession and followed her around even after their deaths, and the quest to figure out what really happened. Along the way, she encountered a kind counselor, a mostly kind detective, and (yup, you guessed it) a kind former boyfriend of her sister's. While it was good that she had that support, those characters weren't developed beyond that point. In fact, there wasn't all that much in the way of character development for anyone. The other main character, big sister Rose, spent a vast majority of the book being absolutely horrible to everyone; very late in the story, her behavior was explained, and while what happened to her was absolutely vile and horrible and I felt sorry for her, it wasn't enough to completely erase the myriad terrible things she had done over the course of the preceding 350 pages. (I want to reiterate that what was done to her was inexcusable, and I absolutely hate that that kind of thing happens to kids all-too-often in the real world. It's just that, in this case, when you're constantly hit over the head with countless examples of Rose's bad, selfish, destructive behavior and how it hurt every single person around her, including Sylvie, time and time again, it can be very difficult to sweep all that aside once the truth is revealed.)

All in all, I went into the book expecting more of a creepy, disturbing, chilling kind of a story, but the main thing I took away from it was sadness because Sylvie lost her parents, her family was in disarray even before their deaths (with her parents making numerous, huge mistakes that negatively and irrevocably impacted all of them), and she was virtually abandoned by her sister and everyone else. As a family drama, it worked; as a main character, Sylvie worked; as a murder mystery, it worked until it was resolved. For those reasons, I gave this one 3 stars. I think that with a clearer focus and some editing out of plodding, repetitive scenes, the book could have been amazing. As it was, though, the story was just okay for me.

Wanda says

I read this book to fill the “Haunted Houses” square of my 2017 Halloween Bingo card.

As in any good ghost story, there is a lot of ambiguity in this tale of family strife and striving. Can Sylvie's father see ghosts or not? What are her mother's capabilities? Are they helping people or just fooling their clients and themselves?

Sylvie is a typical “good kid.” She is co-operative, obedient, studious—even when she doesn’t want to be any of those things. And her sister Rose is the typical “bad kid.” She questions everything, does what she wants to, and makes life as miserable as possible for the rest of the family. Rose and their father clash a lot—probably because they are a lot alike. That’s generally how these things work. My father & I butted heads occasionally because we were both quiet people with strong ideas and more than our share of stubbornness. Other than that, I was pretty much the stereotypical good kid, so I could relate to Sylvie quite well.

I had to wonder about what kind of person would choose a career of helping those with supernatural difficulties. Why would you put your own family into such a situation, where your own children often took a backseat to the children of others? It’s almost a truism that preacher’s kids will get in trouble, often as a way to plead for attention from their parents and that seems to hold true with any of the religious & quasi-religious professions.

In the end, it seemed that it maybe wasn’t the house that was haunted, but the family. Haunted by things left unsaid, paths left untrod, people left behind.

Brittany McLain says

I love a good suspense story. But I don’t know if I am just desensitized or this book was just that boring because I trudged through the whole thing waiting for it to get good and when I flipped the last page I wish I had spent my previous two evenings doing something else. Well written, good character development but I definitely never felt the need to double check the door locks or felt nervous venturing into the basement later that night as the author blurbs all suggested. Very meh.

Yodamom says

I got to 40 % and just couldn’t go on. It is not a bad story I just did not connect to the characters in anyway. I also did not care for the back and forth in timelines. I found my mind drifting while listening to it.

Mandy says

I really expected more from this story.. it left me with more questions than answers. Halfway through I realized that I wasn’t going to enjoy it and that I felt like it was going nowhere. The ending for me started to get better and I wish the author had elaborated more on Rose and her distorted life. I wouldn’t recommend this one and I am sorry I wasted my time on it.
