



Lost Boy Lost Girl

Peter Straub

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From the bestselling author of "Black House" and "Mr. X" springs a groundbreaking story of the persistence of evil, told with tantalizing ambiguity and structural audacity.

Lost Boy Lost Girl Details

Date : Published October 7th 2003 by Random House (NY) (first published 2003)

ISBN : 9781400060924

Author : Peter Straub

Format : Hardcover 304 pages

Genre : Horror, Fiction, Mystery, Thriller

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Sara says

For some reason I avoided Peter Straub like the plague until one day in my twenties whilst stuck in Penn Station without a book I happened upon a copy of "Lost Boy Lost Girl" and out of desperation bought it. I have never looked back and as soon as I finished it I ran out and read everything else the man has written in something like a month.

"Lost Boy Lost Girl" is a ghost story but its also a story about surviving unspeakable loss.

Successful novelist Tim Underhill (a featured player in several of Straub's other works though its not necessary to have read anything else ahead of time) leaves his comfortable NYC loft and artsy friends to return to his childhood home in Millhaven to come to the aid of his horrible brother Mitchell who's wife has just killed herself. Shortly after his return to NYC his beloved nephew Mark goes missing and he returns to his hometown to help in the search. Mark had lately become obsessed with the derelict house that once belonged to a serial killer and had become convinced that a young girl was living there. At the same time its become increasingly apparent to the citizens of Millhaven that a new serial killer is stalking the teenage boys of the town.

Tim's search for his missing nephew leads him into the dark history of Mark's obsession with the house and its mysterious occupant and scares the holy hell out of the reader along the way.

Straub is like a more lyrical Stephen King. His stories are imaginative and frightening but also lovely to read. You can see why they've worked together so often.

"Lost Boy, Lost Girl" is a great first Straub novel (it was mine) and if you like I can't recommend the rest of his works highly enough.

MG says

This was recommended to me by a friend. I am grateful. I had a difficult time getting started with the book. By the end of the first chapter, I was hooked though. I flew through it. I liked the POV. I enjoyed the setting. It was well orchestrated. I enjoyed the cast. I picked it up because it was a ghost story first. It is much more than that. It was, as advertised, a collection of my favorite elements of horror. I think it has something for almost all walks of horror fans. Check it out.

Zoe says

What's not to like in this book? An all male cast filled with one dimensional stereotypes. A major failing of the Bechdel test. A serial killer sub-plot that goes nowhere. An evil house that does nothing. A story about evil where the only person who dies is a suicide, and that's on page one. A story about a ghost where the ghost who finally shows up just wants to have sex...but "off screen," of course. Wouldn't want anything to actually happen in this book, would we?

In a book of dull and offensive characters, only Mark Underhill stands out as a decently memorable person. His uncle is a "famous writer," which means he needs no other personality traits, ever. His father Phillip is a walking stereotype of a racist and misogynist who can't stop thinking of himself longer than five minutes. There's the stereotypical tough talking cop, the plot device super-private detective friend, in case Tim the famous writer needs an answer without actually performing any investigative work, the over confident but really stupid rich white male serial killer in his thirties, Mark's best buddy Jimbo, and Jimbo's equally annoying drunk dad, Jackie.

There are only two female characters who have more than a scene or two of dialogue, one of whom commits suicide, Mark's mother. She rarely talks in the flashbacks, and her presence in the book, even in flashbacks, serves no useful purpose. The other female bit character, Jimbo's mother, serves as a sex symbol for Mark, and a sidekick for grilling Jimbo with Tim. She coos and says nice things to Mark, and then when Tim needs Jimbo to talk, she wags her finger sternly and repeats the same lines over and over: "Now Jim, you tell Mr. Underhill everything you know!" But otherwise she stays barefoot and in the kitchen like a good little woman. There is also supposed to be a female ghost, but she is only mentioned in passing...having sex with one of the guys.

So Mark is the only reason to keep reading, simply because he's the only one presented with any personality and no negative stereotypes. In a book of assholes, he's the only who who doesn't stink. But that's really not saying much, and the story frequently proposes that Mark is a super-genius fifteen-year-old, and every cop who ever dealt with the house of a prior serial killer was retarded. And blind. And so is the current generation of cops as well. I frequently found myself snorting, rolling my eyes, or yelling "bullshit" at the sheer lack of logic in most every scene.

And the narration, oho ome-o my-o, what attempts at narrative emotions that pluck pluck pluck at the heart but fail to stir the organ itself. (And seriously, what did this guy's editor have against commas?) Like the sentence above, the narration FREQUENTLY tries over and over to be artsy, and instead it sucks up what little tension the book has left.

But then it never had much tension to begin with because nothing happens. What did happen is all narrated in the past tense in clinical terms. It's split between a third person narrator and Tim the famous writer's dull journal entries, and this whole story is relayed in such a jumbled way that there is never a sense of danger or dread.

The conclusion is a snoozer that frankly makes no sense. The killer claims to have been emulating The Dark Man to scare Mark, but that does not explain how he appeared in front of a cop and disappeared twice. The killer never mentions this either, so it feels like a loose thread that didn't get snipped out in editing.

This book was dull dull dull with a narrator oh me oh my who was oh-so-gosh darned irritating that I very much long to strangle him with typewriter ribbon. The only reasons I stuck with this story are that I liked Mark and I kept thinking "Any minute now, this is going to get scary." It never did. This book was a major disappointment. I give it 1 star, and I would not recommend it to anyone.

Casey Bartsch says

Even at the very beginning of my read of this short novel, I was on the road to a five-star review. In the middle, I was just as enthralled. Oh, the places this could go! A little further, and things began to unravel,

and by the time I finished the last sentence, we had lost a couple of stars.

First a quick detailing of the premise, no spoilers yet.

Lost Boy Lost Girl is about many things. A mother that commits suicide, her husband who is a jackass, her son whose curiosity about the house next door is becoming an obsession, the crime fiction writing uncle who has come back home to attend a funeral and figure out why his nephew is now missing. Also, a kid named Jimbo.

Different aspects of the plot play out masterfully through different character's eyes, and the writing here is top notch. The only part of the writing I balk at is the "adolescent" dialog between the two friends, Mark and Jimbo. Try as anyone might, it always seems to ring untrue when adults write modern (at the time) kidspeak.

The story also has many different elements: a ghost story equipped with a haunted house, a serial killer story – 2 actually, and things more literary, like broken families, loss; all teamed up with a who-dun-it type of feel, albeit a shallow one.

So, you may have guessed that the issue lies in that none of these aspects play out well; or I should say – to my own satisfaction. The "ghost story" ends up being a few pages of nothing spooky. The serial killer is just – whatever. Nothing is really resolved with the family, and what little closure is given seems pointless.

Now, Spoilers: The ghost, Lucy, is the daughter of a serial killer from long ago, who was the cousin of Mark's mother. When the ghost shows up, all she wants to do is fuck Mark, and bring him into her world. Mark says ok. The End. And, unless I got confused – and I don't think this is really said in the book – but Mark is banging his own ghost cousin – once removed, of course.

His mother kills herself, and that is one of the two main mysteries. The explanation of that seems to be that she couldn't face knowing what she knew about what happened in the house, and that didn't seem – real. So, in the end, the ghost story has no scares, and the serial killer story just kind of, ends. We have a pretty decent backstory on what happened in the house before, and that was undoubtedly the most satisfying part of the book. Then, we have an ending of two young people banging throughout time and space, sending poorly written emails, and badly shot videos to an uncle that I was never convinced was necessary to the story.

Still, the book gets three stars based off of Straub's writing alone. He is one of the best, there is no doubt about that, and in the hands of a lesser writer, I would never have finished this book. I feel like there is some underlying level of clarity here that I just didn't find. After doing a bit of research, I discovered that In the Night Room is actually a direct sequel, so maybe that adds something, and I will probably give it a whirl at some point. Also, Timothy Underhill, the writer uncle, is in some of Straub's other books (that I also haven't read), So maybe that justifies his placement in this book somehow.

From the back page, "[A] wonderful webwork of a book...It's funny, and heartwarming, and genuinely scary." -Neil Gaiman.

Sorry Mr. Gaiman, I love everything that you and your wife do, but none of that is true.

Bruce Smith says

Great story with lots of unusual twists, and hints of past books. It has a little gore and a little romance, and some characters you love to hate or pity or both. Straub doesn't bludgeon the reader with sex or violence. He requires the reader to think about and visualize. The reader must draw their own conclusions, and different readers are bound to have different interpretations.

Stephen McQuiggan says

A boy becomes obsessed with a house on Michigan street, and with the girl inside. It used to belong to a serial killer and now the local kids are going missing. Time to wheel out some familiar characters - Underhill and Pasmore -for another outing in one of Straub's bizarre worlds that exist just a finger scratch beneath this one. The house is one of the best things in the entire book - Straub really brings it alive - and, also worthy of note, is the brief moment Ronnie Lloyd Jones has in the spotlight - electric. A good book but not a great one, certainly nowhere near the majesty of *Ghost Story* - but then so little is.

John Wiswell says

The unsettling account of the connections between a suicide, a missing boy, a missing girl, a serial killer and a haunted house, *Lost Boy Lost Girl* is a strange amalgam of parts. Even its narrative is scattered for such a short book, with a heavy emphasis on the uncle of the missing boy. His presence is so dominant (despite him being removed from nearly all of the plot, mostly learning of events after they happen) that the more intimate perspectives that come later feel out of place. Straub summons some truly creepy notions, like a ball of various victims' hair and an MPEG from the afterlife, but a good deal of the book is either unatmospheric and removed from substance (like the needlessly long introduction) or racing to make up for the boring parts. It might have made a better short story if it had just followed a couple of characters and focused on examinations of the haunted house and the spurious sightings. Straub's prose is the standard stuff found in crime fiction, except when he tries too hard to seem modern, namedropping people and things like J-Lo, Everybody Loves Raymond, cellphones and skateboarding in awkward ways that are often even phrased so clumsily that they come off as a desperate ploy to appeal to younger readers. But despite any shortcomings, Straub delivers a solid (if inconclusive) ending that's so interpretable that it might just warrant the book a second read-through.

Kylene Jones says

I was hugely disappointed in this book. It is the story of a young teen that becomes obsessed with an empty house on the other side of the alley where he lives. It is a house that horrible murders took place many years prior. His mom knows the secret of the house and she ends of committing suicide and then the boy disappears. There is a serial killer on the loose and the assumption is he was now a victim of this man. There were parts of the story that were quite interesting but it did jump around a bit and I just, honestly, was not impressed with how this one went.

Kathrina says

Mark Underhill is a typical 15-year-old boy living with his mom and dad in a typical Midwest middle-class neighborhood. His dad is an emotionally distant public school vice principal and his enduring mom works the complaints desk at the gas company. Mark likes music, skateboarding, and hanging out with his best friend, Jimbo. But Mark's regular life takes a turn when he discovers his mother has committed a gruesome suicide in their own bathtub. From this scene on, Straub's story attempts to terrify readers with supernatural mystique, combining a present-day string of teenage boy abductions with a decades-old backstory of a creepy modified home where lived a serial killing monster. Rape, torture, murder and ghosts all figure in, and Mark's uncle, Tim, arrives on the scene to assist with narrating the story. Conveniently, Tim is a publishing horror author, so he's apparently treading familiar ground...

I'll admit now that this story really disappointed me. It started well -- the writing style had a certain sophistication I don't often find in the mass market horror genre, and Straub wastes little time in preparing the setting and jumping to some action. But the plot construction was weak, some answers he gives up too easily and some he completely ignores, and the climax was overlong and unsatisfying. I'm not happy with his conclusion of Mark's character -- without spoiling I can say that Mark has "disappeared", but remains able to communicate (albeit elusively) with Tim via email, though he has no domain name to his e-address. This just bothered me all kinds of ways -- mostly because, upon entering this book I agreed to let Straub haunt me with ghosts and gross me out with maniac serial killers, but I did not agree to impossible technologies and emails from the afterlife. It felt like a breach of contract. I also have to point to the glaring lack of female characters -- the most robust one of three is a nympho-ghost, and the other dies on page one-- and the preponderance of misogynist males, not just the serial killers, that people this story. I'm guessing the reason we don't really ever learn what happened to Mark is because he was the only likable character, and Straub knew he couldn't get away with any bloody finality for that guy.

One-third through this book I thought I might get a genuine spook, but it didn't pan out this time. Someday I'll find a horror title that not only creeps me out throughout the read, but long after the last page, a story that doesn't crumble in it's resolution. One of the best I've found so far is *John Dies at the End* by David Wong. It's certainly the scariest book I've read, and at the same time, amazingly, laugh-out-loud hilarious at the very same time. How does he do it?

I have a number of horror novels in my own collection -- of all the genres it is a perennial favorite I return to every fall for easy, creepy leisure reading. But I chose this one from the Coralville Library since I'd seen it mentioned several times in readers' advisory materials, and I've been curious about Straub's style, noting that he's collaborated several times with Stephen King. I'm kind of King-ed out at this point in my life, and after this read I don't expect to rush out for any King/Straub co-works. Perhaps a true crime reader with a soft-spot for the supernatural might enjoy this book, but don't push it on your horror fans without fair warning.

Bryce says

Stephen King consistently recommends Peter Straub as one of the great horror writers of our time, so I've been meaning to sit down with one of his books for awhile. When King's cover blurb proclaimed "May be the best book of his career!" I figured *Lost Boy Lost Girl* was a good place to start. Unfortunately, I was completely underwhelmed.

It doesn't help that the premise is a muddled one: Famous writer Tim Underhill is called upon to help his brother investigate the disappearance of his nephew Mark. After his mother's suicide, Mark became obsessed with a possibly haunted house that definitely belonged to a dead serial killer who happened to be related to his mother. Also, there's a modern serial killer kidnapping boys. Got all that?

It's not that the different plot ideas are hard to follow. But at 336 pages, this just isn't a very long book and not enough time was given to any one plot line. I didn't have time to get heavily invested in what could have been very interesting goings-on.

The characters were also mostly flat. Tim Underhill is compassionate and also a writer, but that's where most of the character development ceased. Mark's father, Phillip, is there to illustrate what a terrible father is like. The teenage characters, Mark and Mark's friend Jimbo, are interesting but also clearly written by a middle-aged man who hasn't quite captured a 15-year old's voice. All in all, the characters go through the motions, but there's not much life in any of them.

To sum up, this book consists of a lot of elements that aren't **bad**, but just don't come together properly. I will give Straub another shot, if only because Stephen King is so adamant about it.

Dirk Grobbelaar says

Peter Straub has a way with words. Some people don't like that. "Too *wordy*", they say. Well, I don't share that sentiment. I could immerse myself in beautiful prose all day long, thank you very much.

Now.

lost boy lost girl

A review.

Yes I am here, yes I was real. You denied me.

This is one of the finest examples of **literary horror** I have ever read. I would like to **emphasize** that Peter Straub **does.not.spoonfeed.his.readers**. The "literary" bit is just as important here as the "horror" bit so an **appreciation of the art** is just as essential as an **open mind**. This book is **plenty** creepy, but never resorts to shock tactics; it just sort of sneaks up on you. Although the story is different from, say, *Ghost Story*, the same sense of inevitability seems to be present, simmering just beneath the surface. No, it isn't fast paced, but it doesn't **need** to be, because the story itself carries an unstoppable momentum. You just **know** it's headed someplace.

Hasten hasten, night comes on.

lost boy lost girl is told through more than one viewpoint, and **not** chronologically. There is a reason for this, but it could conceivably throw some readers off the scent. The story is speckled with *just* enough hints for you to start forming your own conclusions along the way, irrespective of how right or wrong they may be. Straub's stories are firmly rooted in reality, even the ones with supernatural elements. The horror he describes, even though palpable, is often subtle and surprising in form. We learn what we need to know about the characters in the way they treat each other, the things they say. This is a story about real people in the real world, and bad things happen; this is not a story about the bizarre, where reality takes a distinct back seat. There is a big picture and it's the things scratching around at the periphery that rattles us, that

eventually turns this story into a **Horror** novel.

Hurry hurry, little boy, do your worst, dark dark night approacheth.

It's a rather clever story about the seductive nature of: (*and here you can take your pick in accordance with your own interpretation of the story*) The unknown? Evil?... and guilt... and whether the resolution of the events is to your taste or not, you'd have to agree that it *is* strangely hopeful and not exactly run of the mill.

Aren't you afraid?

How good is it then?

Well, you don't have to take *my* word for it, but surely Stephen King's opinion carries a bit of weight around here. Also, *lost boy lost girl* won the Bram Stoker Award for best novel in 2003 and was nominated for the August Derleth Award.

It's good!

Look at me, take me in, I am here.

Recommended

Added to Favourites

Michelle says

I've only read a couple of his books, but I am a fan. This story was a strange one. I was expecting more horror to the story, but in the end it was more supernatural than anything. Odd characters, creepy setting and a mystery. I enjoyed this book!

Lara says

This book is the perfect illustration of why I don't read horror. The author has one mediocre idea, and forcibly bolsters it into a book with flat characters, wooden, implausible dialog and embarrassing attempts at proving he did his research on youth culture by tossing in some skate shoe brand names. He's stingy with the "scary" parts, and if I want blood and gore I better stick with Palahniuk and Brite. I thought it might be fun to read something creepy for October, but I may not be finishing this one. (at least not without rolling my eyes every other page)

Charlotte says

Picked this book up in the library because the title intrigued me and I had nothing with me to read. Couldn't put it down. A fascinating story with an intriguing and satisfying ending.

There are many disturbing elements to this story, but for me personally, that simply adds to the overall effect.

I know some people who *hate* disturbing books to the point where they will throw the book out in the trash, and while I don't like seeing mistreated books like that, it's your book so whatever. That's fine. But if you do like (or at least can tolerate) disturbing and sexual things, this is a great book.

There were a few things I didn't like about the book. The characters were relatively flat, which was a little disappointing as one of my favorite things about horror/thriller/disturbing stories is the characters' personal reactions to the things that happen to them. However, the small amount of depth they had was just enough to make this story enjoyable.

Also I didn't like the fact that (view spoiler)

The ending also seemed a bit weak. I don't understand why anything at the end happened. (view spoiler) Seriously, what the fuck? She sounds like a yandere psychobitch. Even if she was mentally the same age as her body, or even younger, *nobody* is that random. Total logical disconnect there.

That said, it was still an amazing book.

Shannon Yarbrough says

I've known about Peter Straub since my Stephen King days in high school, though I never read "Talisman" which he cowrote with King. When a recent bookstore was going out of business, I snatched up most of Straub's work in paperback and finally decided to give him a try. I started with *Lost Boy Lost Girl*.

I thought this was a decent read and it reminded me a lot of King's writing, where we are given a horrific story line but the author chooses to avoid the graphic scenarios and instead dwells inside the minds of all his characters, which is often a much more dangerous place to be. Here, we have a serial killer, a suicide, a missing child, and a ghost girl, but Straub doesn't spoon feed you the details of any of these conflicts. Instead, he flushes them out as his here and now characters must explore the situations and find the facts as to what is really going on.

That being said, sometimes this doesn't work. Sometimes you much prefer the details over the fodder. But Straub somehow makes it work. I didn't find myself bored or skimming through conversations between characters. I was invested in the story just as he hoped I would be.

Timothy Underhill, the lead character in the book, is Straub's alter ego and apparently makes appearances in some of Straub's other writings. He's a likable character here which made me turn to Google to research him, and also made me eager to immediately pick up another one of Straub's books. This is a great "different" type of horror book which I certainly appreciate. I can't believe I haven't read Straub until now, but I will certainly again.

Fabian says

Not an altogether horrible horror novel. It's not, bless us all, the diarrheal trainwreck that was "Ghost Story," one of P. Straub's most strikingly overvalued works. No, this one has the Michael Myers-like phobia of the suburbs, of the persons lurking in the house next door. And if the biggest implausibility of a fifteen year old twink having sex with a salacious ghost girl doesn't strike you as too absurd, then the read is worthwhile. But if like me you had expected to come face-to-face with the Dark Man/the Shape/the Boogeyman at the end of this, well, this might not be your type of book.

Shine says

It was not scary at all. There's just this millionaire, Ronald Lloyd-Jones, who was obsessed with a serial killer named Joseph Kalendar and looked up to him so much that he kidnapped boys and tortured them in Kalendar's house since he bought the property after Kalendar left.

I think that we have to give credit for Mark and Jimbo for finding out what crept out Nancy Underhill that led to her suicide. Jimbo too for being a loyal friend to Mark even though he left Mark alone to his search for answers to the mysteries presented.

Philip Underhill, on the other hand, is your typical father who did not care much of his family but for himself. He thinks he has already done good for the family and is enough but all of these were not felt at all by the family. Even his wife felt his coldness; she did not feel his husband's love and care. (so cliche, I know.) Well, you get the jist.

I'm new at giving reviews so please bear with me guys. I appreciate feedbacks or critiques as long as they're relevant. Thanks. Happy reading! :D

Emily Davidson says

Okay, so I really don't know what to think about this book. The plot was very intricate, so points for that. And it kept moving, which kept me reading, but it took a little while for it to get going. At the end it seemed like there was some stuff that wasn't fully resolved. For example, does Mark really just vanish into some spirit world? I would have liked a tad bit more explanation on that front about how it happens. Or does he get killed? Or go crazy? And what about his mom's suicide? What was up with that little ghost girl she saw? Was that Lucy Cleveland in another disguise?

SO MANY QUESTIONS!!!! Normally I don't mind having a few at the end of a novel but this many? I don't know...

It was still a very enjoyable book overall, and the characters seemed very real to me. Other than all the unanswered questions, I loved it and I still highly recommend it :)

J.D. Barker says

A haunted and inspired tale as only Straub can weave.

The Behrg says

This book was electric.

A ghost story, but not quite a ghost story.

Mysterious, but not quite a mystery.

This is a tough book to pigeonhole under a single genre title and, in truth, I found it more literary fiction than anything. (Though of course Straub is known as a horror author). This book accomplished what so few do in the genre however, and was a carefully crafted rubix cube puzzle that continued to unlock a square at a time in a delightfully fulfilling way. The characters were fully realized, dialogue crisp and realistic, but the two things that really made this book stand out were Straub's exquisite prose and the way he played with the timeline.

This year I've read far too many novels with a present storyline and a past storyline where the two come together at the end. In this novel, the storylines are interwoven to such a degree that they're constantly traipsing over each other but in a much more complex puzzle. With journal entries and competing point of views, it makes for an intimate journey. To give an idea of the complexity of the storylines and the way this novel is revealed, here's a great quote:

"After reading a section of an early journal of mine, Maggie Lah said, 'You write your journal like it was fiction.' I said, 'What makes you think it isn't?'"

The plot is extremely simple. A boy goes missing after his mother commits suicide. There's a mysterious, perhaps haunted, house. And the boy's uncle, a successful writer, who comes to play a major role in the unraveling of the mystery. We've seen variations of this a thousand times over to the point that the story itself almost sounds cliche. Straub proves he's a master of his craft, however, and it's no wonder this was a Bram Stoker Award Winner.

Don't expect in your face scares or huge momentous twists, but if you're looking for a subtly nuanced story where tension and atmosphere bleed off the page, you've found your next read. By far one of my favorites of the year.
