



## Paper Tigers

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In this haunting and hypnotizing novel, a young woman loses everything—half of her body, her fiancé, and possibly her unborn child—to a terrible apartment fire. While recovering from the trauma, she discovers a photo album inhabited by a predatory ghost who promises to make her whole again, all while slowly consuming her from the inside out.

## **Paper Tigers Details**

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Author : Damien Angelica Walters

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## From Reader Review Paper Tigers for online ebook

### A.C. Wise says

Paper Tigers is a novel about healing, about feeling broken, and what people will do to feel whole again. Years ago, Alison was caught in a terrible fire. Roughly half her body is covered in scars. She lost an eye, two fingers, and sees a physiotherapist regularly to manage her pain. She rarely goes out, and when she does, it's at night, when no one else is around. She covers herself with a scarf and glasses, and hardly speaks to anyone except her doctors and her mother, and even then, they are the ones to initiate the conversation. However, on one of her nighttime walks, Alison happens on an antique shop that keeps hours as odd as hers, and is drawn in by a photo album in the window. She purchases the album and quickly discovers an entire world within its pages – a house she can literally visit, populated by ghosts who seem real. While she's in the album, and for a brief time after she emerges, she's whole. The healing doesn't last, and her scars return, so Alison ventures into the album again and again, despite the feeling that something is terribly wrong. The album's primary ghost, George, gives off an air of malevolence, and in the real world, she's wasting away, neglecting to eat, and wanting nothing but to sleep. Paper Tigers could easily have been a straightforward story – hapless character finds a spooky item in a mysterious antique shop and bad things happen, but it's so much more. The idea of a haunted photo album is a fascinating concept on its own, but on top of that, there are the hauntings within hauntings, in multiple senses of the word. The character of Alison takes the book beyond a straightforward ghost story. Her pain is real, the trauma she's suffered coloring her entire life. Her desire to feel normal is palpable, and it makes her need for the world inside the album completely understandable. Walters doesn't succumb to an easy, hand-waving solution where magic makes everything better. This isn't a 'cure narrative', but it is one of acceptance as Alison moves toward an understanding that there are different ways to be whole. The ghosts are presented both as a genuine haunting, and a kind of addiction. Alison goes through withdrawal, she fights, she backslides. Nothing is easy or pat, and the book is stronger for it. There is some genuinely creepy imagery here, as is often found in Walters' work, along with a thoughtful examination of pain, recovery, acceptance, and the stages of grief.

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### David Bridges says

Paper Tigers is a hauntingly somber coming of age story of sorts. Not coming of age in the sense of a young boy or girl discovering themselves with time and experience, but coming of age in the way a traumatic event destroys someone and they are forced to rediscover themselves. It is also a gothic ghost story set in Baltimore. Finally, I also felt Paper Tigers had some body horror elements to it as well. Walters does a great job of conveying the Allison's emotional pain but she does an even better job of describing the constriction of her physical scars.

After being severely burnt and losing everything in a fire, Allison is slowly mustering the courage to get out of her house again. On a late night walk she is invited into an antique shop and finds an old photo album. The album begins to lure Allison into the time period and world of those who are photographed with in the photos. She discovers that some horrible things happened inside the house pictured in the album. She also discovers that her scars disappear when she is inside the album. Eventually Allison is forced to choose if it's worth staying in this scary world with no scars or face reality as a burn victim. Also, while traveling back and forth between reality and the ghost world she realizes she could be risking releasing a brutal murderer from the photo album to the real world.

I put the spoiler button on this review but I am not really going to give anything away. I just want to say that the book doesn't have a happy ending but I really really liked the ending. I am not one of those people that thinks all endings should be happy. I enjoyed the book overall but found the ending exceptional. If you're looking for a lot of excitement then *Paper Tigers* may not be for you but if you like gothic ghost stories that are haunting and melancholy then *Paper Tigers* should be right up your alley. This is my first Damien Angelica Walters book and it won't be last. I will definitely check out her other work. As an established fan it is no surprise that Dark House Press continues to come strong.

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### **Josh says**

With only one novel and one collection to her name before this, Damien Angelica Walters has nonetheless garnered quite the following in genre circles, and with good reason.

In *Paper Tigers* we meet Alison, a young woman bearing the scars – physically and emotionally – of a fire that stopped her former life in its tracks. Once well on her way to becoming a teacher, she now lives a life of isolation, afraid to set foot outside of the house. Her body is unrecognizable, her fiance is gone, her hopes and dreams seem a distant memory. Her mother and physical therapist are trying in earnest to help, but things are moving much too fast for her to handle. She hasn't lost hope, but she's stuck in a sort of limbo.

One day, having summoned the courage to get out for a walk, she comes across an antique shop wherein she finds a curious photo album which might be just the thing she needed. The photographs are like doorways to the past, to a house inhabited by a man who has the power to take away her scars. It's an incredible offer, but of course there's a price to be paid.

From here on out, as Alison moves between past and present, her internal plight and the things happening to and around her are masterfully intertwined. In some passages *Paper Tigers* reads like a psychedelic, classically gothic fever dream, while in others it becomes a quiet rumination on the way past scars can transmute and take on an internal life of their own. The whole of it is wrapped in purposeful, delicate prose. Upon rereading, it reveals multiple layers, both of Alison's psyche and the nearsighted way our society often views the contrast between beauty and ugliness.

The novel's structure lends itself to a sort of vicariousness that has to be difficult to pull off, and it's testament to Walters' skill as a storyteller that everything here comes together as well as it does. As Alison drifts in and out of the album, the reader becomes drawn into the book she inhabits. Sometimes gentle, sometimes harsh, the way these pages flow is like the breathing of a living thing. It doesn't quite cross the line into metafiction, but it's fitting that the last part of it is called "The Final Page".

This isn't just a great novel – it's one of the best horror novels in recent memory. If you're a fan of the genre at all, you owe it to yourself to read *Paper Tigers*.

*review originally published at hellnotes.com*

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### **Paul says**

Dark, moody, and disturbing novel about living with scars, living with damage. An impressive debut novel!

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### **Lori says**

I was extremely hesitant to request this book from the publisher, yet I couldn't ignore the book-club appeal because holy-cow-would-you-look-at-all-the-stars-people-are-throwing-at-it. Though it sounded like something I could absolutely sink my teeth into it, it was setting off every one of my warning bells before I even cracked it open, and for good reason. Hindsight. What a bitch, eh?

Sadly disappointing, *Paper Tigers* was neither haunting nor hypnotizing. I was expecting a chilling and spine tingling "haunted house" story, but instead all I got was a big ole steaming pile of whatthefuckery. Damien Angelica Walters kept me at an arms length, her writing both cold and disengaging. I couldn't get into, no matter how hard I tried.

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### **Carina Bissett says**

I've been waiting a while to write a review after savoring this luxurious piece of prose, but I still can't quite find the words to describe *Paper Tigers*. As always, Damien's deft hand at turning a story and her evocative language leaves readers hungry for more. This story is one of loss and loneliness, but it explores the themes in a way that keeps the characters fully-fleshed despite their desires to present themselves in the shiny and bright masks they wear. Alison, the main character of *Paper Tigers*, wears her scars with vivid despair and I couldn't help but hope she would find redemption and hope. This was one of those stories I wanted to never end, which makes it one of those rare novels I will read again and again.

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### **Benoit Lelièvre says**

Some people just "get" it. Damien Angelica Walters just knows what's terrifying about the human condition. In her novel *PAPER TIGERS*, Walters draws a line between living and existing which her character is caught on the wrong side of after a devastating apartment fire and her struggle for survival leads her not only to the edge of sanity, but to the tipping point between two worlds: a universe of pain and a universe of loss.

Walters also puts her gorgeous writing skills on display in that novel. Her command of the craft is impressive. She illustrated the ethereal and phantasmagorical ordeal of her protagonist through the very structure of her sentences. *PAPER TIGERS* is a terrific and original horror novel that channels the best from supernatural, psychological, eighties and body horror to create a melancholic, elegiac and terrifying story. A stupendous work of art.

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### **Claudia says**

I love ghost stories. This story by Damien Angelica Walters is the best ghost story I have read in recent years. It is terrifying, poignant, and satisfying within the same story. Alison has seemingly lost everything that was important to her in a terrible accident. She is engulfed in pain and self pity. Upon purchasing an old photo album in a rare venture out of doors, she is presented with what appears to be a promise of

resurrection. There are ghosts at work here, but not just the ghosts trapped in the album. Alison is nurturing her own internal ghosts from her former life. All of these entities are fed from the same well; Alison's misery and desolation. She is virtually eating herself alive and feeding the entities who want her to join them, all in an effort to be whole again. We are challenged to answer the question, "What does being whole really mean?" Can we be spiritually whole in a destroyed body or can a perfect body contain a deconstructed soul? Ones' ideas of what it means to be complete are challenged on many different levels in this story. I highly recommend this book and look forward to Walters next literary offering.

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### **Sarah Read says**

This is a poignant story about wounds and loss and healing, and not healing. How we hold on to past images instead of growing with ourselves. There are all kinds of hauntings in this story, and each layer gives us another look into Alison's heart. You'll never look at old photographs the same way again, after this.

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### **D. Ward says**

“Tell me, when you burned, did the flames kiss your skin like a lover?”

If you want to know the answer to that, you'll have to find it in the pages of this remarkable novel by Damien Angelica Walters. As for my experience, this book consumed me. Slowly. All the way through the last page. I was enthralled by it and, although I wanted to know how things worked out, I was reluctant for it to end. For the spell to be broken.

But that's not really how it works, is it? The books we love—the ones that haunt us—never really let go of us. Cognitively, I know this. Still, with PAPER TIGERS, I took it slow, reading a few pages at a time, stalling, hoping, dreading.

Everything from the main character Alison to the Baltimore setting, even to the supernatural material... is handled with a subtlety, authenticity, and perfect pitch that is rarely seen. Honestly, I could go on about all the elements of this book that I love, but you just have to pick it up yourself, fall in, and get lost in the tale, the characterization, and the gorgeous writing that binds this chilling tapestry together.

In short, PAPER TIGERS is a ghost story written with graceful, often poetic aplomb. This is heartbreak horror that will leave you awestruck, damaged, and yearning for more.

If that sounds like what you're into, get this book into your life. And do it now. That's my advice.

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### **Audra (ouija.doodle.reads) says**

(Please check out the full review on my blog: <http://shelfstalker.weebly.com/shelf-...>)

“I am like a small creature swallowed whole by a monster, she thought, and the monster feels my tiny movements inside.”

?This line comes from Shirley Jackson's beautiful, haunting, classic masterpiece *The Haunting of Hill House* and it's an epigraph to *PAPER TIGERS*—one that couldn't be more apt.

This is the story of Alison, a girl who is disfigured by an accident and left alone with only occasional visits from her overbearing mother and the old photo albums she collects for any comfort. She can't bear to go out into the world because of the way people will stare and whisper, so she stays locked inside with her thoughts and hurts and visions of herself as a Monstergirl.

But what happens when one of the old albums Alison finds is inhabited by someone or something? She's haunted by the album, visited by its real owner and finds herself getting sucked further and further into the paper world. But not all is quite right; Alison is frightened by the power of the album as much as she is enticed by its possibilities.

I felt that this book was an exploration of the split between the internal and the external self. How are those selves actually different? Who is the real me? Does how the world sees me matter? If it does, then does my external self create and mold my internal self to some extent? Alison's whole life revolves around her disfigurement—she isn't able to be who she was anymore. In fact, she isn't allowed to lead any sort of normal existence. But in truth, the only person who is stopping her from this is herself.

Do yourself the favor of checking out this amazing author, and this amazing press as well. You won't regret it!

Here's my one-line blurb: A beautifully written, chilling haunted house story that is both about the ghosts we create, give life to, and cling to, and the supernatural ones that may find us and use our internal ghosts against us if we are so unlucky.

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### **Andy Weston says**

Stripped to the bare bones ghost stories can seem ridiculous. A woman looks at a picture in her living room. Each day the man in the painting gets larger or nearer. How ridiculous does that sound? Yet Susan Hill makes it full of tension, totally captivating and scary even. Within her writing style is a sense of the gothic, a tinge towards every small aspect of the story.

I begin this review talking about another book, because that isn't what happens here. Hill carries it off, making what might seem a trite storyline into a wonderful one. Walters doesn't. This is the story of a woman recovering from surgery following a house fire. She has some disfigurement and is reclusive. She leaves the house rarely, but in one occasion buys an old photo album from an antiques shop. The album itself is haunted. In this précis it seems ridiculous. Walters's writing cannot match other ghost story greats. She does not breathe the necessary life into the story. It is also too long. Novellas and short stories are a good length for ghost stories, but most of all, it is a disappointing read because suspense or tension is not created.

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### **Book Riot Community says**

The description of this novel had me hooked at "photo album inhabited by a predatory ghost" - I needed no further convincing. And it is indeed weird and scary and great. I saw it described on Goodreads as "a

psychedelic, classically gothic fever dream" and I have to agree. This is a story about scars, both physical and metaphorical. Alison is recovering from a horrible apartment fire, which claimed her fiancé and left her horribly burned. When she comes across a ghost in a haunted photo album, he promises he can make her whole again. But everything comes with a price. This book is a weird ghost story wrapped around a message about beauty standards. I'm really glad that I read it.

Tune in to our weekly podcast dedicated to all things new books, All The Books:  
<http://bookriot.com/category/all-the-...>

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### **Zakk Madness says**

Paper Tigers is a wonderful piece of intimate horror. Thoughtful and thought provoking. It is a quiet, melancholy read, a ballad strumming away on your heartstrings. Damien Angelica Walters' prose is syrupy sweet and infectious, leading you through mysterious landscapes.

The narrative of Paper Tigers unravels at a methodical pace, giving up pieces of the puzzle that don't from pictures just yet. We are living vicariously through Alison, a woman who's damaged on the outside, fractured on the inside. But yet she stands. She breathes. She finds connections in photos of people long past and/ or forgotten. When one lost/ found photo album calls to her specifically, whispering sweet nothings of a new life she lets her focus shift, becoming one of the lost. Alison's story demands attention and getting caught in her plight is inevitable.

Paper Tigers isn't a book that you can just plop down, open a page and read. It doesn't connect that way. For full enjoyment you must find a quiet place, open yourself up first, make yourself receptive to the prose. Like the photo album, only then will Paper Tigers open to you, show you its sights.

It is quite enjoyable, a definite recommendation for those who desire the emotional side of dark fiction. For those wanting a read that would rather dance in the surrealism of shadows than bathe in the flash of spectacle...

Not to say there aren't any spectacles to behold.

"She popped out her prosthetic eye and threw it on the floor, not caring if it cracked. What did it matter? It was a trick, a fake. Like the album. Or the tiny diamond ring tucked away in her jewelry box. Oh, the stone was a real enough, but the love behind it wasn't. Not real enough for a Monstergirl, but she didn't blame him. Who would want to be with someone who wore her real face? No one. No one sane and normal and healthy would."

Overall score: 4.5/ 5

Zakk is a big dumb animal!

Ex Libris: The Eyes of Madness

[Www.facebook.com/themouthsofmadness](http://www.facebook.com/themouthsofmadness)

\*\*Note: I received a review copy of this book from the publisher on the promise of an honest review. These

are my unbiased feelings.

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## Tammy says

**The nitty-gritty:** An atmospheric and eerie ghost story with psychological undertones that make this a satisfying horror story on several levels.

*The house held only broken dreams, shattered screams, and secret little dirty things. It was a liar's playground, a dead man's last stand.*

I was pleasantly surprised by Damian Angelica Walters' short story collection ***Sing Me Your Scars***, full of visceral and at times hard to read horror stories about pain and loss, and so I jumped at the chance to read her debut novel. Dark House Press is a new-to-me publisher, but I guarantee this won't be the last time I read one of their books. Even the ARC of ***Paper Tigers*** is beautifully produced and designed, and I can tell the finished product is going to be gorgeous. And what's between the covers? Well, it's just as impressive. Once again, Walters' lovely poetic voice mixes with her themes of despair and loneliness to create an unusual and terrifying haunted house story, one with an added layer of psychological horror. I'll tell you one thing for sure: I'm never going to look at an old photo album the same way again...

Alison was happily engaged to be married, when a terrible apartment fire changed her life. Trapped in the burning building, she lost an eye and two fingers, and her body is now covered with disfiguring and painful scars. Trying to cope after the fire, Alison lives by herself with only her mother and her physical therapist to keep her company. She calls herself "Monstergirl" because of her scarred body, and she has stopped leaving her apartment during the day. Instead, she ventures out only at night, prowling the streets near her home and mourning her past life.

On one such night walk, she spies an old photo album in the window of a thrift shop, and on impulse decides to buy it (the shopkeeper just happens to be there at three in the morning—just go with it!). When she brings it home, odd things start to happen. Alison smells tobacco smoke and the scent of flowers wafting up through the pages, and the man in the photo on the cover seems to be trying to communicate with her. And then one day, she literally tumbles down *into* the photo and lands in an unfamiliar house filled with cobwebs and shadows. Alison doesn't understand why she's able to visit the house in the photos of the album, but one thing is clear: when she returns to her own time and place, her disfigurements have miraculously healed.

As she gets to know the shadowy people in the "paper house" as she calls it, Alison is drawn in by a sinister man named George, who promises to make her whole and beautiful again, if only she will stay with him.

Caught between her desire to be normal once more, and her increasing fear of being trapped in the photo forever, Alison must face her fears and decide if she can embrace being Monstergirl.

In her last book, Walters' stories were full of graphic violence and disturbing imagery of bodies being cut into and changed for nefarious purposes. This time around, the horror is less graphic but no less disturbing. The terrifying landscape is mostly in Alison's mind—her memories of the fire and her isolation because of her scars and injuries. Before she even introduces the weirdness of the photo album, Walters makes sure Alison is already in a bad place and barely able to function in normal society, and then she literally throws her down a different kind of rabbit hole (and yes, I think the name "Alison" was intentional) where she's given a glimpse of what life would be like if she *weren't* Monstergirl.

Walters' prose creates a sense of creeping terror, as she slowly reveals the evil force inside the photo album. I loved the escalating feeling of dread as Alison slowly begins to realize just how dangerous it is inside the photos. And if you're wondering about the details of Alison's horrible experience in the fire, you won't find out until much later in the story exactly what happened to her. The author divides her tale into sections, each one beginning with a small peek into the nightmare behind Alison's injuries, so by the end of the story the reader has a clear (and upsetting) picture of just what happened.

For most of the story, Alison is alone, which was another reason this story worked so well. If you've ever been alone with your own thoughts, and I'm sure many of us have, you'll know just how quickly your head space can become a frightening place to be. And we get to hear each thought in Alison's head, as she must decide how to handle the strange situation she's in. Other than the ghostly figures in the photo album, Alison's only other contact with another human is with her mother, a kind and nurturing woman who wants nothing more than to see her daughter happy again. And as much as Alison loves her, you can tell she's also stifled by her mother's never ending ministrations.

My favorite parts of the story were the ones where Alison goes into the photos. She thinks of the photo album as a "paper tiger," hence the title of the book, who will "swallow you whole." At first, Alison is charmed by the parties, glittering candles, and the swirl of party dresses she encounters in the house. But it's not too long before she realizes that the people there are merely ghosts and echoes of the past, and that something—or someone—has trapped them forever in this odd, paper realm. In addition to the horror story that's going on inside Alison's head, Walters uses one of the scariest tropes in horror fiction—trying to get rid of an object that keeps coming back—to great effect.

As for the ending? Well, of course I'm not going to spoil that for you, but I will say I *loved* it, and I can't imagine this story ending any other way. *Paper Tigers* is an excellent example of the type of psychological horror that will get under your skin and stay there.

**Big thanks to the publisher for supplying a review copy.** Above quote was taken from an uncorrected proof and may differ in the final version of the book. This review originally appeared on Books, Bones & Buffy

