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Trapped in the Mexican jungle, a group of friends stumble upon a creeping horror unlike anything they could ever imagine. Two young couples are on a lazy Mexican vacation—sun-drenched days, drunken nights, making friends with fellow tourists. When the brother of one of those friends disappears, they decide to venture into the jungle to look for him. What started out as a fun day-trip slowly spirals into a nightmare when they find an ancient ruins site . . . and the terrifying presence that lurks there.

The Ruins Details

Date : Published July 18th 2006 by Alfred A. Knopf (first published 2006)

ISBN : 9781400043873

Author : Scott B. Smith

Format : Hardcover 319 pages

Genre : Horror, Fiction, Mystery, Suspense, Thriller

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From Reader Review *The Ruins* for online ebook

Kemper says

Scott Smith's wrote one of my favorite crime novels with *A Simple Plan* that released in 1993. Thirteen years later came his second book, *The Ruins* which instantly became one of my favorite horror novels. I've got my fingers crossed that sometime later this decade he'll write another one and maybe it'll turn out to be the greatest sci-fi epic I've ever read.

The concept here is dirt simple. Idiots go somewhere they shouldn't and bad shit happens. In this particular case four American college students, two boy-girl couples, are on vacation in Mexico where they meet several other tourists from all over the world. A German named Mathis tells them that his brother got smitten with a woman and followed her to an archaeological dig in the jungle, and that he needs to retrieve him before their flight home. The Americans and another Greek fellow decide to join him and set out on an impromptu adventure following a hand drawn map to a remote location.

A bunch of unprepared and ill-equipped tourists wander off into the jungle? What could possibly go wrong?

After they find themselves trapped on a hilltop by something that defies belief the young people endure thirst, hunger and injuries and have to consider extreme actions in order to survive.

The sub-title of this book could almost be *A Series of Bad Decisions*, and that's one of the aspects that made it unique for me. A lot of horror is based around punishing people for their actions. Frankenstein gets his monster for daring to try to change the natural order. Jason slaughters teenagers for acting like teenagers. In *The Ruins* there is no single moment of arrogance or failure of character to point out as the thing that bring about the situation. (Although there are plenty of small examples of rotten behavior that make it that much worse.) Rather it's just the sunny optimism that everything will be OK that puts these kids in a leaky canoe headed up that fabled Shit Creek with no paddles.

Smith does a great job of playing off the human nature of being in a bad spot and wondering how you got there only to have the sickening realization that you knew for a while that you heading into trouble, but you somehow talked yourself into staying the course it with the assumption that everything would work itself out.

The characters themselves are a departure from what you get in most horror novels these days. Yeah, I know some people hated them, and they truly are a pack of insufferable dumb asses for a large part of the book. But I think what some readers really didn't like about them was that they did act the way most of us would in those circumstances. For example, Jeff tries to play the hero, and while you can empathize with his frustrations with the others he's also being a complete douche bag for not acknowledging the bigger picture. The others also act with varying amounts of denial and panic.

What's interesting is that there are no easy answers as to how they should be behaving. (Serious spoilers here.) (view spoiler) So there's this uncomfortable push-pull between the traditional concept of doing every single desperate thing you can think of to survive versus realizing that you're fucked and just giving up. That's the grey zone where this book operates and part of what I found so compelling about it.

I've seen some complaints about the nature of the threat, and I'm not sure if that's still considered a spoiler or not so I'm throwing it under a tag. However, I'm only discussing what they're facing while not giving up any plot details. (view spoiler)

So this one retains its high spot among my personal rankings after reading it a second time. It's not your typical horror tale, and it's a gruesome story that shows people behaving poorly in dire circumstances which makes it an uncomfortable read at times. But isn't that the point?

Tom Mathews says

The buzz is that this is an extremely graphic novel so I have put off reading it for several years. Now that I have read it, or listened to it actually, I'm not going to disagree with the buzz but I am going to say that this was easily one of the best horror novels I've ever read. I wouldn't change a thing about it.

Adam says

Scott Smith's *The Ruins* is one of the best horror novels I've read in some time. It would be really easy for me to rip into it. The premise is, frankly, ridiculous, and its plot is nothing but doom and gloom. So why did I love it so much? Simply because it was completely convincing, engrossing, and terrifying. I don't think I have ever found myself squirming as much while reading as I was for this book's last 20 pages or so.

I think *The Ruins* works as well as it does because of Smith's writing and characterizations. There are a lot of negative reviews of this book on this site. The most common complaints are that the characters were unlikable, that there were no lofty themes or messages in the story, and that the nature of the threat the characters face in the Mayan ruins where most of the book takes place was impossible to take seriously.

I didn't find the characters at all unlikable. They infuriated and saddened me consistently, because their flaws were all either ones I see in myself or in other people and am powerless to change, but I never found them unlikable. They are drawn so well, in fact, that they really seemed like real people to me. And real people in peril are the worst kind of people. If you've ever wondered what your significant other or best friend would do in a situation of extreme peril with you and found yourself feeling sick and worried, then this novel will probably twist your guts up. And terrify you.

No big themes? Again, I liked this. If there were, it would have blunted the terror. This is a story of a few people in the midst of a crisis over the course of a few days. They don't have the luxury of reflection, and neither does the reader. This book might not teach you anything, but its immediacy is chilling.

As far as the nature of the threat that faces them in the ruins, I can't disagree. There are a number of reasons why it's incredibly silly. But at the same time, in the context of the story, it's really not. I, for one, found it disturbing for a number of reasons.

If you're able to read *The Ruins* and tell yourself, "This could never happen," then you'll probably hate it. But if you're able to give yourself over to the situation and see yourself in the novel's characters, you will feel a creepy and pervading sense of doom.

Sadie Hartmann Mother Horror says

I'll start this review off with a quote from a fellow Goodreads buddy, Edward

"That's one of the things I loved about this book. All the characters were either assholes or idiots."

And this is the truth.

What would happen if a bunch of idiots/assholes vacationed in Cancun and stupidly went into the jungle looking for a stranger's lost brother without proper attire, supplies or even at the very BASIC LEVEL, a way to get back home?

You can read all about one author's imaginative tale of just that very thing!

The Ruins was recommended to me over and over again in my quest to read good horror. I finally found it at a thrift store and I snatched it up! (even if it had an ugly movie cover--which I would never watch)

This book plays out like a movie in your mind. It's very convincingly and plainly narrated with an easy flow that draws you in and pulls you close. I never could find a good place to stop (maybe because my edition didn't have clear chapter breaks?)

We have clear, easy to identify characters that are easy to relate to--I related well to Amy, the one who never wanted to go on this effed up trip to begin with and struggled with not complaining the entire time!

I would say that this story had a "slow burn" atmosphere--very unsettling and tense for a long time with bursts of terror sprinkled throughout--even a few gross outs and some cringe-worthy descriptions.

I withheld half a star because I really wasn't that scared. (probably because this book was a chaser to Nick Cutter's the Troop)

Also, one thing kept running through my mind the entire time which would have saved lives but I won't tell you because that would spoil all the fun! If you've read this book and you want to ask me what it was, hit me up on Instagram and I'll tell you! Hahaha

Anyhooles, in summation: Awesome, gruesome, classic horror--a thrilling, chilling tale!! A must for any horror fan.

Dan Schwent says

When four American college students and a German tourist go on a foray into the Mexican jungle, searching for the German's missing brother, they have no idea of the horror they will find themselves entangled in. Will any of them leave the jungle alive?

I was in the mood for some horror and received recommendations for this book from two highly regarded reviewers. I'm proud to say Kemper and Trudi weren't wrong.

The Ruins is the story of five people who make a series of questionable choices and wind up trapped on top of a hill with a killer vine terrorizing them. It reminded me of The Troop quite a bit in the way the relationships disintegrated as supplies ran low and the vine got more and more vicious. After one stupid mistake, things quickly fell apart. I'm surprised the characters lasted as long as they did.

This book seems to have a polarising effect among reviewers. Part of it is probably that it straddles the line between horror and thriller, stymying people who like to be able to slap a convenient label on things. The other part is probably the characters. I didn't find any of them overly likeable but I didn't hate any of them either. Sure, I wanted to slap them around from the moment they decided it was a good idea to go for a romp in the Mexican jungle all the way until the end but that's how horror stories of this type go sometimes.

Eric's self-mutilation was one of the creepier parts of the book, made creepier at the end when it turned out he actually had vines inside him. I felt bad for Jeff, trying to hold things together when everyone else seemed

continually on the verge of losing his or her shit. I think I would have pushed some assholes down the mineshaft when he came back to find them all drunk.

The vine was creepy but that wasn't a surprise since plants are emotionless monsters. Just look at the Venus Flytrap or watch how quickly plants overtake an abandoned shed or cabin. I didn't have a problem with the plant's intelligence but I will admit that its mimicry was a little far fetched at the end.

While *The Ruins* isn't your grandma's horror novel, it delivers the goods if you're looking for a tale of desperation and creepiness. Four out of five stars.

Matt says

I've always had this conception that the horror genre, be it books or movies, are meant to be scary. So that's how I've judged various entries in the field. *Did this [book or movie] scare me?* Mostly, the answer is no. Real life itself is so terrifying that fictional fears really don't do anything for me. After all, no monster springing from an author's imagination is quite so terrifying as my student debt load.

While reading Scott Smith's *The Ruins*, it occurred to me that my concept of horror is wrong, or at least strikingly narrow. That I was grading horror on the wrong scale. To be successful, horror doesn't need to scare you. At least not in the **BOO!** sense of the word. It should also horrify you. Yes, I recognize this should be self-evident, that legions of youngsters flocking to Eli Roth's torture-porn oeuvre knew this intuitively. What can I say? I'm old, and I'm starting to recognize all the things I don't get. Anyway, *The Ruins* isn't frightening, but it is horrific. Almost from the start it filled me with dread, creating a weird tension as I longed to read on and hesitated to read on.

The setup is rather standard. Young people, ostensibly good looking, find themselves in a wee bit of trouble. Things get bad before they get worse. The setting, of course, is paradise, because there's nothing like inverting the joy of being young, attractive, and in Mexico with the unspeakable terror of being hunted by something inexplicable and perhaps supernatural.

Jeff and Amy are med students. Eric and Stacy are not med students. Stacy and Amy are friends. All four are enjoying some time on the beach, getting drunk and lolling in the sun. They meet Mathias, a German tourist who is looking for his brother. They also meet some Greeks, one of whom they nickname Pablo. Mathias suggests they go meet his brother at some Mayan ruins. He has a crude map and a general notion about what they might find. For some reason, Jeff, Amy, Eric, Stacy, and the functional alcoholic, non-English speaking Pablo all find this a good idea.

It does not, in fact, turn out to be a good idea. The six get stranded on the ruins for reasons that I will not explain further, at the risk of spoiling plot points.

Smith is like the Salinger of the modern suspense novel scene. He has written two books. This is the second, *A Simple Plan* was the first. Both are excellent. Both were bestsellers. Both were made into movies. One of those movies had Billy Bob Thornton in it. That movie is not the one based on *The Ruins*, because there is no place for Billy Bob Thornton among young, attractive vacationers getting themselves into a situation. Unless, I suppose, Billy Bob *is* the situation. *A Simple Plan* came out in 1993. *The Ruins* followed (at the speed of George R.R. Martin) in 2006. He hasn't published anything since. I haven't been able to figure out why.

This is a shame. Because Smith does quality work.

The Ruins is an absolutely fantastic book that I can't say much about. The writing is superb. Smith knows how to modulate his prose so that it is at times evocative, at times descriptive, and at other times unobtrusive, as the story barrels forward. At the start, the characters sort of blend together. But that changes as Smith draws them in firm, bold strokes, revealing personalities and back stories in an effectively poignant way. I cared for these stranded people. Even Pablo. Well, maybe not Pablo.

This is a battle for survival. The characters are put through a desperate wringer that lasts 369 pages in my trade paperback edition. Smith grounds things so well in reality that I readily accepted the gradual ratcheting of the horror elements.

There are passages in *The Ruins* that are among the most brutal and graphic things I have ever read. And I say this as a person who makes it a point (on occasion) to discover what is out there in the world of brutal and graphic. Yet the gruesomeness is not gratuitous. It perfectly complements the tale that Smith has set out to tell.

When the heat of summer starts to break, when I walk down the grocery aisle and say to myself, *I should get some soup*, when the leaves overhead turn orange and yellow and red, and fall to the sidewalk where they brown and crumble underfoot, and when the beer I drink comes spiced in pumpkin, that is my window for reading horror. Since I only read this kind of novel during the Autumn/Halloween season, I don't claim to be an expert.

I also recognize that horror, like religion and politics, creates wildly divergent reactions in people. If you look at the Amazon reviews, there are as many 1 star ratings as 5 star ratings. I can understand that. If you don't accept the central conceit, then all is lost. Setting that aside, I still contend that Smith's literary skills are objectively first class. He excels at scene-setting, characterizations, dialogue, and creating tension.

In my humble opinion – again, the opinion of a man who reads two or three horror novels a year, at best – this is a classic. It does not have the bleak, thematic brilliance of Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*, which I hold to be the greatest of all works of horror. But it comes close. This is a novel that got inside me, insidiously. It is vivid and horrifying and ultimately unforgettable.

Campbell says

Wow, what a disappointment. I'd been so excited about this-- I'm not a horror novel fan, but this had gotten such great reviews, I figured I'd give it a try. The trailer for the movie also looked intriguing. Unfortunately, you may as well just watch the trailer and read the first forty pages of the book, because beyond that, it doesn't deliver.

My first issue with the book was the characters-- they're the most one dimensional people I've come across in long time. Goldilocks had more personality. It's hard to feel a whole lot of sympathy or empathy for characters who are nothing more than stock types-- "the ditzy sexy girl"; "the boy scout" etc. Smith acknowledges their single dimensions midway through the book when the characters are talking about a film version of their situation and one of the character breaks them all down into types ("the boy scout" "the prissy girl" "the slut" "the funny guy"). Too bad Smith never makes the effort to flesh the characters out. It's hard to get too worked up about their deaths when you don't feel like there's anything at stake.

The second problem (and a far bigger one, in my opinion), is the lack of pay off. Early in the book, the characters end up stranded on a mountain, kept captive by a Mayan village who forces them to stay on the mountain with this monster plant. Yeah, yeah, the plant's terrible, it's carnivorous and smart and is able to torture and kill it's captives. Once I got to the point in the book where it's clear the characters are stuck on the mountain, I thought, "I sure hope the next 400 pages aren't spent just detailing how these people die. I sure hope we solve the mystery of where the plant came from, why the Mayans are in collusion with it, and if it's truly a plant at all or an extension of something much more ominous below the surface." So if you ask yourself the same questions and think you'll get answers later in the book, save yourself the time. None of those things are answered and it is, in fact, 400 pages of describing each of their demise.

Part of the problem stems from Smith's tactic of only writing from the point of view of the American characters. If the characters were interesting, it might be worthwhile to see how they handle this awful and confusing situation, but we've already addressed that these folks are pretty dull. I think a more interesting approach would've been to either tell part of the story from the Mayan's point of view or from an omniscient POV, detailing the history of why such a malevolent force is at work in this spot. Maybe my perception was skewed from the film trailers in thinking that this might be revealed.

I found the book frustrating because the characters briefly seem to be going in this direction, mentioning how the Mayans have contained the plant and guessing at why they continue to hold people captive here. They also touch on the fact that the plant may not be a plant at all. Unfortunately, Smith doesn't explore these ideas either through speculation on the characters' parts or by having the characters physically seek out the source of the plant. Sure, it may be unbelievable that the characters would risk their lives trying to find the source, but believability went out the window when the plant started talkig. Smith already set up that the characters are boring, not so bright, and going to die anyway, so why not have them die in the pursuit of what this thing actually is?

Overall, I thought the book was pisspoor. The first 40 pages are good, the story is tightly wound and propulsive, but after that, you may as well watch any generic slasher flick.

Horace Derwent says

The power of syntax and lexico

And it's just a mindfuck, hail?

the hardcover edition received, HELLYEAH

life is ephemeral, many books in ours just can't get the chance of being read twice, but absolutely not for this book \m/

Trudi says

*****Please indulge me while I float this older review for a horror novel that remains near and dear to my heart. If you are looking for some genuine thrills and chills this Halloween season, this may be the book for you. Happy All Hallow's Read!**

I just don't get the storm of criticism aimed at Scott Smith's second novel, *The Ruins*. Why do people love to hate this book? I found the story to be brutally convincing and the characters believable (if not always very

likable). These are college-age kids backpacking in a strange country. Four of them are American and tend to be not too bright and a lot self-absorbed. But that's realistic.

Sure the story is about man-eating ivy and that may strike some readers as too silly to be scary (a la *Little Shop of Horrors*) but that's not where the real horror lies anyway. The vine is merely a plot device to trap the college kids in the jungle and force them to confront (and attempt to survive) a series of terrible events.

So it's not high brow literature or anything but it is a visceral, visual novel filled with moments of genuine terror. Under such conditions of extreme physical danger and psychological stress, the six travelers succumb to various coping mechanisms; when they are not turning on each other, they are turning on themselves. The situation becomes a fascinating microstudy of human behavior -- "the group in peril" scenario we've seen before in classic stories like Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, Saramago's *Blindness*, or Stephen King's novella "The Mist".

So I stand strong in my defense of Scott Smith's *The Ruins*; I just can't figure out why those of us who do seem to be vastly outnumbered. The amount of vitriol being launched against this book verges on hysteria and is completely unjustified. My advice is to not let the nay-sayers keep you away from this book. Give it a chance; like me, you just may think it's great.

Nancyc says

I just finished reading *The Ruins* by Scott Smith. If you plan to read it, stop here, because I'm about to take a stroll through it.

Reading *The Ruins* as a writer, got through the first 75 pages and asked myself how this writer managed to get me to follow these people into the jungle when I didn't particularly like any of them.

The Ruins is about four recent college grads on vacation in Cancun, who go off on an adventure to help an acquaintance find his brother. The college grads are comprised of two American couples, Eric and Stacy and Jeff and Amy. Although they have distinct personalities, none of them stands out as a person I would follow on a day trip away from the beach. When their German friend, Mathias, tells them that he must travel to an obscure Mayan archaeological dig to retrieve his lovesick brother, Jeff volunteers himself and his friends to keep him company. And let the foreshadowing begin.

None of the Americans really seem happy to leave the beach. Eric is so hung over, I expect his eyes to start bleeding, Stacy doesn't seem to think about whether she wants to go or not...she just follows Jeff's lead and remains the classic follower until there's... um...no one left to follow. Amy whines about going but then remembers she's been criticized for whining and summarily shuts up and goes. And I follow right along with them, thinking, "They're not really prepared. Do they know where they're going? Should they trust Mathias?" They have a hand-written map, where public transportation only takes them within 15 miles of the spot. The bus ride is ominous, the pickup truck ride to the trail head is stressful, the truck driver tries to warn them, they encounter an entire town of Mayans who try to stop them, and Amy continues to snap photos. At the last minute, a smiling Greek, bearing the gift of three bottles of tequila, joins them.

That the Greek speaks no English is only one of the language barriers the Americans encounter. They can't talk to the Mayans either. And the Mayans are clearly trying to tell them something kind of important.

Something like, Don't Step Onto The Hill With The Red Flowering Vine. They do, of course, and that seals their fate. Looking back, I don't know why I didn't predict the end. They all die. There are no heroes, no survivors. Their collective penchant for sniping at each other and their private pools of fear and self-doubt take them straight to their deaths.

That pretty red-flowered vine turns out to be a carnivorous plant with super human abilities. It can mimic them in their own voices and knows just what to say to hurt them better than a kid sister with a crush on her sister's boyfriend. When hunger makes them swoon, it can engulf the hilltop with scents like freshly baked bread or steaks barbecuing. Yep. It's one mean plant. But the two couples, the German and the Greek never really question what it is or why the Mayans feel the need to keep them on the hill at gunpoint. They never try to find a weakness in their enemy. Nor do they work to make a plan to escape. They wait, hoping that the Greek's companions will come for them. Two other Greek men, who don't speak any English, Spanish or Mayan, are their only hope for survival from this situation.

Is there a message here? Something beyond entertainment? The Ruins does break a lot of formula expectations. No survivors, no heroes, no escape plan. They are four Americans, newly graduated from college, affluent, white and ready to begin adult life. By American standards, they are four young people who have the world by the ass. Yet they are not prepared to survive any difficulties. In fact, they are all basically lead to their deaths, whining and longing for another drink.

Another thing that Smith does is he keeps them all alive for an agonizingly long time after their fate is sealed. I kept expecting people to start dying off. But no one dies until more than 3/4 of the book is gone. Once the first one dies, though, Jill comes tumbling after... they drop pretty quickly. The sad part is, I'm grateful to see them go. They're the kind of people you might have a drink with at a tavern and never remember any of their names an hour later.

Okay...since I said at the beginning that I was going to go through the book, I don't feel like I've spoiled anything for anyone. Just thinking it through.

Aaron says

Stephen King has a short story (that I believe may have been entitled "The Raft") in which four college students head out to an old rock quarry. They swim out to a raft in the middle of the lake. As the afternoon progresses, they notice what appears to be a patch of oil skimming the surface of the water. One of the students dives into the lake for a post-coital swim and is mysteriously and grotesquely devoured by the oil patch, his skin pretty much being stripped right from its bones. Now horrified, the remaining students are now making an attempt to get to shore without being overtaken by the patch of oil.

I was reminded of this story as I read this book. I was reminded of Stephen King in general as I read this book. It has Stephen King-like plotting and character development. It is praised by Stephen King in a back jacket critical blurb. The only real difference between this novel and the novels of Stephen King is that this book has a better ending.

Endings? Yeah, King pretty much sucks at those.

Anyway, this novel concerns two American couples who take a summer trip to Cancun, sort of a last hurrah

before school starts up again. While in Cancun, they become friends with a German man named Matthias (who does speak English) and a trio of Greek tourists (who do not). Matthias announces that he is searching for his missing brother who headed into a Mayan archeological ruin with a hot archeologist he met on the beach. The brother never returned. Collectively, the two couple, Matthias, and one of the Greeks decide that it might be fun to go check out the Mayan ruins. Everything, and I do mean *everything*, goes to hell from here.

If you like horror novels, you should read this book. Well-paced, well-plotted, and just well-done overall, this is the best Stephen King novel that Stephen King never wrote.

Michael says

Requires a decent suspension of disbelief, but it's absolutely propulsive. No one plots better than Scott Smith when it comes to events spiraling out of control, and the writing is clean and full of drive. Very well-done.

Cody | codysbookshelf says

It'd been a while since I read a book that horrified, sickened, and amazed me in equal measure; *The Ruins* did all those things with ease. I was shocked at just how much I loved this novel. I did not expect it to totally blow me away. The characters are mostly unlikable and infuriating, and I must admit I had trouble reading about them at first, but that's the point — being trapped in the jungle and fighting for one's life brings out the very worst in a person.

This is a brutal, agonizing read. There are no chapter breaks, and because of that it feels like a knife slice to the jugular. Scott Smith is unwavering in his quest to horrify the reader; you can almost imagine the maniacal grin he wore as he doled out pain and suffering to his unsuspecting creations.

I'm going to keep this one short and sweet: I really loved *The Ruins*. In fact, it's probably in my top five horror novels — it's that damn good. It pushes every button, as good horror should. I can't wait to check out this author's debut novel, *A Simple Plan*.

This was a buddy read with my friend Sadie. I had the time of my life. :)

Edward Lorn says

Enough said.

Dirk Grobbelaar says

Are you lost?

Jeepers – this novel was hard to read! Not because it was bad by any means, but because of the harrowing situation the author creates for his characters.

The Ruins features some pretty explicit descriptive imagery. I'm not sure whether I would describe it as an overly "gory" novel though. The blood and guts sequences are treated with the clinical detachment of a surgeon: that's to say, it's pretty bloody but isn't all that messy. Except, of course, when it is...

What really got to me was the psychological build up. I kept imagining myself or a loved one in a situation like this.

[He] had the urge to vomit, his tongue going thick, bile rising in his throat.

While I didn't particularly care much for any of the characters, I found **The Ruins** to be a fairly tense, visceral read. I had sweaty palms on more than one occasion, and could almost physically share the sensations experienced by the cast. But, to be clear, don't expect too many character dimensions here.

She didn't like the rustling sounds. It seemed as if more were happening out there than the wind could account for.

Smith writes in an easy to read, almost conversational style, which speeds things along. All in all, it was actually pretty good. It wasn't quite what I expected, but this is perhaps a good thing. Stephen King seems to have enjoyed it, at any rate (he wrote the blurb).

She hated it for being able to move, for its hunger, and its malevolence.

The Ruins has some layers if you are prepared to look for them. I have a number of questions and thoughts which I can't discuss here because they would amount to spoilers. It isn't groundbreaking, but if you're a fan of survival horror, or creepy crawly stuff in general, you might want to check this out. [I have not seen the film, so I have no opinion on that]

3.5 stars

How does it know? How does it know? How does it know?
