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The Haunting of Aveline Jones

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Editor's Choice:

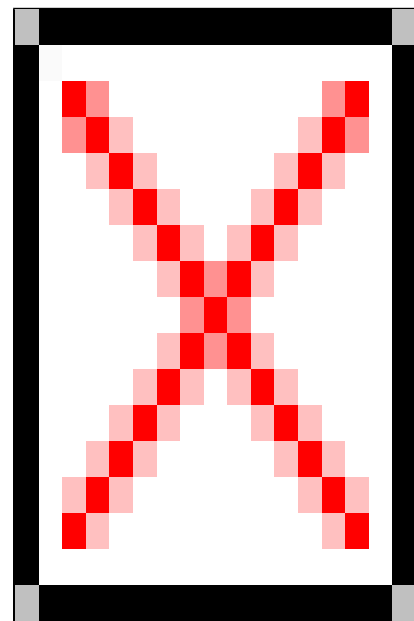
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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5



Aveline Jones is taken to stay for a few days with her Aunt Lilian in late October, after her mother leaves to visit Aveline's sick grandma. Aunt Lilian lives in a small coastal village where the weather appears to be unremittingly bad, from squally winds to relentless rain, and frightening towering stormy waves. When Aveline picks out a ghost story anthology in the local second-hand bookshop, she is intrigued to find that it previously belonged to a girl who went missing thirty years earlier on Halloween. But why did she cross out the last story in the book, and what's the connection with the creepy scarecrow figures that appear in town? What's more, there are some very creepy noises at night.

Phil Hickes has written a scintillating and quite terrifying ghost story for the age group, with a phenomenal build of suspense and foreboding. He juxtaposes the normal everyday of cheese toasties and holiday boredom with a quite phenomenal degree of spookiness and eeriness, which makes for a manipulative read. Most effective, is the way in which he invokes the darkness and cold of the season against the backdrop of a deserted seaside town and the perils of the sea. Icy winds blow from the book into the reader's mind, and the salty bite of sea air and loathsome smells of wet

seaweed permeate the nostrils long after closing the book. But again, this is set nicely against visions of snuggling down in front of a burning fire and the warm welcome of a cosy bookshop, and so the reader is constantly alert to their senses and the tension of the story.

Ghost stories work best when they set the supernatural against the down-to-earth, and Hickees understands the ebb and flow of story as well as the sea ? with touches of humour, references to modern day life including tutoring, mobile phones, and chips, but also the tropes of supernatural horror from a handprint on a window, to footsteps in an empty room above.

Using a raft of different media including diary entries and newspaper reports, as well as a story within a story, Hickees weaves history with present day to link a community in togetherness as well as in ancient superstitions. The clever use of a child?s diary shows the affinity readers can have with the written word ? the relationship between the protagonist and the diary writer in the book mirroring the intimacy between the reader and Aveline.

This is a well-crafted clever novel, with a strong female protagonist who is both brave and intrepid, and secondary characters who are reliable and well-defined. Hickees also understands the sweet relationship between children of upper-primary school age, and their ability to forge new friendships, as well as to occasionally feel a little alone, especially those with extra vivid imaginations.

Illustrations and sprinkled spooky quotations throughout add to the escapism, and the challenging use of vocabulary and metaphor is well incorporated within the text, leading to an atmospheric piece of prose.

Phil Hickees has pitched this book well for the readership, with enough spookiness to scare, but not too much goriness to terrify. It reads with a freshness and vitality. Along with Crater Lake, it seems horror for this age group is coming back into fashion, and this is a great entry point for reading under the covers at night. There?s a second novel featuring Aveline Jones to come if readers haven?t scared themselves silly with this first adventure.

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