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The dead and the monstrous will not leave Kyle Murchison Booth alone, for an unwilling foray into necromancy has made him sensitive to--and attractive to--the creatures who roam the darkness of his once-safe world. Ghosts, ghouls, incubi: all have one thing in common. They know Booth for one of their own . . .

The Bone Key: The Necromantic Mysteries of Kyle Murchison Booth Details

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From Reader Review The Bone Key: The Necromantic Mysteries of Kyle Murchison Booth for online ebook

Caro M. says

First of all I want to thank you guys for giving my review those seven likes even before I actually had written any review. I don't know how you did that, but I appreciate it! Seven is a lucky number!

Now, the review. I must confess, I'm a bit disappointed with Mr. Kyle Murchison Booth and his amazing titular Bone Key, because it wasn't amazing at all. Who ever have called it amazing? - you may ask. Well, I did myself, because I thought the title was luring and promising, duuh. Also that sweet word "necromantic", mmmm...

Here I will tell you, I will actually warn you, that if you're reading a horror book and in the first chapter there's a sentence like *"I've read/seen unimaginable terrible things in there, too terrible to mention any of them to you"* don't expect fireworks in following ones. OK, maybe I'm too harsh, maybe you will say Lovecraft didn't do that much either, he worked with atmosphere, but I will riposte, that Lovecraft did describe Cthulhu in detail dozing over there on his rock or w/e, or how stinky Dagon was and didn't say *"they saw a creature so horrible, that I won't be describing it here to you"*.

So not really much necromancing is going on, not literal one at least, but you will get the atmosphere and a lot of atmosphere building. Which actually worked. But I wanted something more. Something bone chilling or at least unsettling.

Instead you will read a lot of how Kyle was nervous, stressed, getting pale, getting red, sweating, feeling uncomfortable, escaping in his mind, escaping in real, trying to not be seen, etc, etc. Kyle is a recluse and an introvert with paranormal abilities and psychological problems, to say the least, and all he wants from people around him is to leave him alone. Which I could understand and support to the point that I wanted to not finish the book, so Kyle could live his life not being distracted by anyone.

Which said, I must confess I liked him as a character, yes, surprised much after all this bitching, yeah?! I liked Kyle, even though he was stiff and unsociable and I just pity that he wasn't given some more action, some more interesting stuff to do, than just polite conversations or watching things going on with others. Or self-loathing.

In fact, I even find this book beautifully written, masterfully, in great style and atmosphere that is comparable to the great masters of suspense and horror. The ideas were good, the horror parts... I don't know. I didn't get scared. Maybe 11 year old me would be. I have no idea why people tag it as horror. It's not, it is really not. I'd tag it as an old fashioned victorian gothic (is there a progressive victorian gothic, btw?) and label it +12.

So yes, I am a bit disappointed with this story collection, it was a bit too slow, too tame for my liking, but I also enjoyed the writing, some parts of it really much, but it missed the WOW element, a lot. 3 stars, because in general I liked it. If you like your gothic a bit sedated - you can give it a try.

Brigid Keely says

"The Bone Key" is a deliciously creepy and well written set of short stories in the vein of M. R. James and H. P. Lovecraft. Told from the point of view of painfully shy and fussily overly educated Kyle Murchison

Booth, we the reader are privy to the secret dark world that lies just beneath the thin veil of normalcy that most people see. Booth is privy to that dark world as well, to his regret.

Lotta says

Started kind of slow, but really grew on me. The MC reminds me much of an unhappier, lonelier Whyborne from the Whyborne and Griffin series. Well written, with a very sad undertone.

Issendai says

The Bone Key was okay, but I couldn't escape the feeling that I'd read all the stories before. It felt as though the author was new to writing horror and had to get all the basic tropes out of her system before she could move on to inventing new twists. I don't know whether that's true of Monette--she wrote some splendidly horrific moments in *Melusine*--but it was the lingering impression I was left with.

Not to say it's not a good read. Kyle Murchison Booth is the book's greatest strength, a profoundly introverted and very odd man who's not at home among his own species... and doesn't get along all that well with non-humans, either. (With one disastrous exception.) As a character study, *The Bone Key* is excellent.

K.J. Charles says

A very enjoyable set of ghost stories, creepy and inventive. Excellent writing and painfully sad at points. The author never loses sight of the worst evils being entirely human. The Lovecraftian museum is particularly wonderful and in its weird way very funny.

Reread July 18. Better than I remembered. Sad, sensitive, queer, and a beautifully judged arc of stories that interlock just enough and climb to a kind of tiny candle-flicker of hope in human nature.

Fey says

Let me start by pointing out that I'm already a *huge fan* of Sarah Monette. I *love* everything I've ever read by her. I suppose that could make me biased towards her works, but I'd actually like to think that it only makes me more harshly demanding. After all, if I've rated most of her other works 5 stars this one has A LOT to live up to.

But oh look - ANOTHER 5 Star Rating. She's done it again! damn I love this woman.

Kyle Murchison Booth is a quiet, shy, reserved man; an insomniac with very little social life, and seems to spend most of his time at the museum where her works, cataloguing old books and papers. He does however stand out from the crowd, being that he is well over 6 foot tall and all his hair is mysteriously and prematurely pure white. And then add in a brush with necromantic magic that has in some way attuned him

to the darker side of life, so that he's practically a ghost magnet. Well. He's certainly my kind of protagonist.

The Bone Key is a collection of 10 short stories (in which Booth is the first person narrator), most of which were originally published separately in various horror zines and publications. Obviously they can each be standalones, but they're much better collected together in one giant ghoulish smorgasboard. Apparently Monette's chief inspiration for Booth was Lovecraftian horror. I'm afraid I can't comment much on that, as I think I was born a little too late in the century and lovecraft completely passed me by! But honestly, this? This was some bloody good horror.

The best things about *The Bone Key* are probably also the worst things. Hear me out..

The Good: They're scary as f*ck.

The Bad: They're SCARY as f*ck.

The Good: The individual stories are quite short. You can get through them really quickly.

I'd rather not be stuck in the middle of a horror mystery just at bedtime.. I'd 've never get any sleep!

The Bad: They're short and they're over quick. Yes they're *that good*.

In conclusion: Sarah Monette + horror = win.

Chloe says

I liked this collection of short stories a lot - it's creepy and gothic and a little bit gay (in short, it's just about everything I love).

I happened to start reading this book not too long after finishing another collection of short horror stories, Thomas Ligotti's *Tales of a Dead Dreamer & Grimscribe*, so it's inevitable that my mind jumps to compare the two, and Monette overall ranks more favorably than Ligotti in my estimation. The two are clearly influenced by H.P. Lovecraft and Edgar Allen Poe, and both write horror stories that are more under-your-skin-creepy than outright gory. But the differences more or less end there. Ligotti is the more complex author - but this isn't exactly a compliment. The stories of Ligotti's that I enjoyed were scarier and had a more lasting impact on me than Monette's stories, but I had much more fun reading *The Bone Key* than I did Ligotti's works. Monette makes it clear in the forward to her collection of stories that despite being a fan of Lovecraft and Poe, she wanted to correct the lack of sexuality and sustained characterization in their work. Ligotti's short stories all have no link to the other, so eventually, reading his collection became a chore. It was difficult to distinguish between stories, and because I didn't have enough time to get to know each new narrator, I sometimes had a hard time caring. In contrast, this collection of short stories avoids coming off as disjointed because Monette sticks to just the one narrator. I will say that, at times, Monette's writing seems a little watered down and obvious, but it's much preferable to how obscure Ligotti's writing could get.

Kira says

A very quick read, but I loved it. I have some mixed feelings on Sarah Monette's work, but I think she excels at short stories.

I'd love to read any further forays into the horror genre from her. It was amazing to read Lovecraftian horror without having to flinch and cringe around all the racism.

Jamie Collins says

This is a collection of creepy, melancholy short stories; a suitable read for the Halloween season. The stories all feature Kyle Murchison Booth, a sad, painfully awkward museum archivist who is beset by ghosts and other monstrous things. The setting is left deliberately vague; I got the impression of a city in New England, perhaps sometime in the 1950's.

I like Monette's writing. The overall tone here is subdued, and the first few stories are rather slight. I might have found them unsatisfying on their own, but they worked well together in this collection.

Jam says

Sarah Monette is a thinky writer and this definitely plays to that strength. In the introduction, Monette says that she wanted to write something with the feel of M. R. James and Lovecraft, but that acknowledged things that are conspicuously absent in James and Lovecraft's works - things like strong women and sexuality.

And she succeeded remarkably well, to the point where I almost don't want to mention it because when I'm reading it, I don't have to think about it. It's a good thing, when you're reading a book (and after you finished), when you don't have to agree to ignore aspects of it.

It means you can concentrate on the fact that the stories are real, old-fashioned horror without having to hand-wave over the author's obvious issues with X, Y or Z. The style is that mixture of understated combined with very specific moments of precisely terrifying descriptions that is a feature of that type of horror. The monsters are often monstrous, are things that are genuinely creepy and dangerous, but most of the evil, the wrongness is human. Even the things that are dangerous and need to be resolved, are sometimes sympathetic.

The book is a collection of horror stories set about 1950, published separately and in different magazines, but with the same narrator. Later stories do refer to earlier ones, but you can see that they'd play well separately. The narrator, Kyle Murchison Booth, is an archivist, withdrawn by nature and socially awkward (and according to Monette, the most autobiographical of her characters) and a good narrator. Observant, on the outside and uncomfortable, but also unable to look away as much as he might like to.

Strongly recommended, especially for people who like their horror creepy-terrifying, rather than graphic.

Riju Ganguly says

While I'm as thoroughly enamoured with the writings of M.R. James as one can be, I have had this feeling of incompleteness for quite some time now that the scholarly protagonists featured in his stories are not real, because they are simply too devoid of earthly passions, except fear. On the other hand, his antagonists (including the spectral ones) appear to be more real, since they are full of hatred, avarice, anger, and all other

emotions that are on display everywhere in 'real' life. One 'Jamesian' author who had overcome this deficiency, and had given us some awesome horror stories in the same vein but which were much more believable (and hence absolutely terrifying), is Reggie Oliver. I am happy to state that I have found another author who has also broken through that ceiling, imbuing her characters with humane emotions, while staying true to the Jamesian maxim of malicious ghosts, incorporating several nasties from the world of Lovecraft in the bargain. She is Sarah Monette.

I had come to know about Monette and her absolutely outstanding collection of loosely connected horror stories in a Facebook group discussion. The book has been arranged in a manner that conveys the impression of it being a collection of experiences of a scholar, Kyle Murchison Booth, who used to be the Senior Archivist at Department of Rare Books in Samuel Mather Parrington Museum. The contents of this book are:

- ? Introduction
- ? Introduction to the Second Edition
- 1. Bringing Helena Back
- 2. The Venebretti Necklace
- 3. The Bone Key
- 4. Wait for Me
- 5. Drowning Palmer
- 6. The Inheritance of Barnabas Wilcox
- 7. Elegy for a Demon Lover
- 8. The Wall of Clouds
- 9. The Green Glass Paperweight
- 10. Listening to Bone
- ? Story Notes
- ? About the Authors
- ? Acknowledgements

Trying to summarise the stories, or the 'adventures' (bad ventures?) of Mr. Booth, would be a horrific act that might undo all the pleasure that you are likely to gain from the reading of this book. Hence I would desist from that act, and would simply submit that if you like to read Jamesian horror stories, but with modern sensibilities that are not to be found in the classical works of that great author, then look no further. I myself would be waiting for a further lot of 'papers' to be unleashed upon the unwary world by Sarah Monette eagerly.

Highly Recommended, obviously.

Mike (the Paladin) says

I think that a more appropriate shelf for this book would be "Horror (sort of)".

The Bone Key is a book of short stories all themed around the narrator who works for a museum.

This guy is an amazingly dried up, shy stick of a man. At first it's just "there" but eventually I was shaking my head at the character and groaning...

That's not all that changes as you go. The stories in this volume are supposed to be an homage to H.P. Lovecraft and Edgar Allan Poe, and you can see it. There are clear connections to given stories. At first that's interesting. I was involved in it till a little over halfway through and was frankly just bored.

Then I realized why. These stories are to Lovecraft and Poe as diluted tea is to whisky (whiskey) neat.

The stories are interesting at first but they usually boil down to mild haunting stories where things get tied up with Kyle [Mr. Booth] (our protagonist) wiping away sweat and being very...nerve wracked.

On a couple of occasions he does actually have to deal with ghosts or revenants...still it's very (are you ready) very "low **key**."

Okay, anyway not bad but not great.

Sesana says

The Bone Key is actually a series of short stories, all about Kyle Murchison Booth (nobody calls him Kyle) and his encounters with the paranormal. He traces them back to a necromantic rite he foolishly helped a friend perform, which seems to have made him more receptive to strange things.

In her introduction, Sarah Monette says she was inspired by M. R. James and Lovecraft. It shows, mostly in the atmosphere. I was not at all surprised to discover that she had a story published in the anthology *Lovecraft Unbound*, which is just a little further down my To Read list.

Our hero, Booth, will not be to every reader's taste. He is painfully shy, socially awkward, reserved almost to the point of being a hermit, and very academic. He's also gay, which plays prominently in two of the stories but otherwise simply forms a backdrop to his character. I actually loved Booth, being painfully shy, etc. myself.

The stories could have used a bit more punch, though. My spine tingled in a few places, but overall I was not left checking over my shoulder as I read. The one image that will haunt me is the wrenching ending of *Elegy for a Demon Lover*. But scared? Not so much. This is a minor issue, because I wasn't exactly expecting to be scared witless, and the stories are good enough that I just didn't care.

There is apparently a (sort of?) sequel which prints four more Booth stories. I'll be trying to get my hands on it, too.

Terra says

I ranked this 5 stars not because I felt that any of the stories within this collection was perfect. I don't, and I probably would have ranked any individual story within the collection a 3 or a 4. Maybe a 4.5. Though many of the stories did things I wish more stories would do, particularly with regards to the way Monette explored subtle nuances of a character motivation that other writers might overlook.

No, the real reason I ranked this a 5 was because these ten sometimes-imperfect but always compelling 3 and 4-star stories combined in a way that, for me, painted a convincing and faceted portrait of a character who, by the end of the book, had become fascinating and engaging in his own right, well beyond the context of each story. And that definitely deserves a 5.

I have no idea if Monette plans to write more Booth stories, but I certainly hope so.

Margaret says

My god, this was a good book to read on Hallowe'en. Almost too good, in fact. I finished reading it in daylight, but the atmosphere it created was with me well into the evening.

Kyle Murchison Booth is a museum archivist, bookish, erudite, awkward, and painfully shy. After a reluctant experiment with necromancy, in the collection's first story, "Bringing Helena Back", he finds that he has opened the door to the world of the supernatural, beginning a series of encounters which will bring him into contact with ghosts, ghouls, demons, and the mysteries of the human soul. The stories are all excellent -- subtle, witty, atmospheric, and quietly bone-chilling -- but it's Booth himself whose presence pulls them together and makes them remarkable. He could choose to ignore the odd events around him (some of them, anyway -- some demand his attention), but he can't; his compassion for others and most of all, his deep need to know and understand compel him to investigate the mysterious happenings around him.

I wasn't sure I'd like *The Bone Key*, as I'm not generally a fan of horror or ghost stories, but I was willing to give it a try because I love Monette's other books. I'm very glad I did. Once I started, I couldn't stop; I wanted to draw the stories out longer, but I couldn't tear myself away, even when I told myself it would be nice to save some for the evening to read while waiting for trick or treaters.

If I had to pick out favorite stories, I would say "The Venebretti Necklace", which has a wonderful secondary character among other virtues, or "Elegy for a Demon Lover", which brought tears to my eye, but honestly, they're all absorbing.

Stephen says

Admirers of M.R. James will discover much to **dote on** in this collection of **linked short stories** revolving around a museum archivist specializing in rare manuscripts, who has the **unenviable misfortune** of routinely **confronting** the bizarre and the **not-so-natural**. Sarah Monette has crafted and polished 10 pieces of gothic horror that harken back to the classic "bump in the night" tales of the 19th Century.

Eschewing gore in favor of atmosphere, Monette creates visions of intelligent, nuanced dread. She won't make you scream aloud from sudden moments of in-your-face terror, but she will conjure icy fingers to squeeze your lungs and steal your breath away.

Despite getting her inspiration from masters like Lovecraft and James, Monette recognized the shortcomings of such writers when it came to character development...not to mention casual racism, smack-bottom gender inequality, and homophobia. Therefore, in her intro to the collection, Monette states that her intent was to distill the above masters' prodigious ability to manufacture fear, and channel it into stories unstained by distasteful "isms" and peopled with characters worth caring about.

She succeeded, and the result is our protagonist, Kyle Munchinson Booth.

Over the course of these stories, we come to know Mr. Booth as a highly intelligent, well educated person who suffers from almost debilitating shyness and a pathological need to solve mysteries. He is tall, lanky, socially awkward, and insecure, despite being extremely capable at his work. He lost his parents at a young age, grew up with the nastiest of guardians, and is gay, an orientation that adds to his isolation given the time

in which he lives (i.e., early 20th century).

Booth is a good man and it's hard not to like him. The relationship that develops between him and the reader during the course of the stories adds considerably to their effectiveness.

THE STORIES:

The first three stories, "*Bringing Helena Back*," "*The Venebretti Necklace*," and "*The Bone Key*," left me very underwhelmed. They were well-written and easy to read, but the ghost element was pedestrian and lacked the oomph to move the needle on the fear meter. From these stories, however, we do learn about the museum where Booth works, about his unrequited love for his best friend, and that he lives under a family curse, which is explored in the title story.

A major upgrade occurs with story #4, "*Wait for Me*." In this one, Monette finally got my creep organ tingling, and left me experiencing heebies and jeebies for days afterwards whenever I passed a mirror. Following that gem is "*Drowning Palmer*," a solid effort that finds Booth revisiting his boarding school days in a story themed around bullying, the wolf pack mentality and the stain of abuse that lingers on those that perpetrate it.

The next two stories are my **favorites** in the collection and show what Monette can do when she's firing on all cylinders. First up, "*The Inheritance of Barnabas Wilcox*," which reads like a perfect M.R. James pastiche. In it, Booth finds himself coming the aide of one of his boarding school tormentors in a plot revolving around a dark quest for immortality. The end is absolutely flawless.

Second in the "best of collection" double header is "*Elegy for a Demon Lover*," during which we finally see Booth address/confront/embrace his sexuality in a story that is both gorgeously written and achingly powerful. Full of love, loneliness, passion, and gut-wrenching despair, the end will leave all but the heartless moved. When I think of the character of Booth, this is the story that springs to mind.

Next up is the longest story in the collection. "*The Wall of Clouds*" finds Booth seriously ill and on the verge of death following the events of the previous story (Note: the cause of Booth's illness is never explained, but Monette makes it clear in the afterward, and I think knowing this adds something to this story). Booth is sent to one of those convalescent hotels that are not-quite-a-hospital to rest and recover. Well, it turns out that an abnormally high number of people staying at the hotel have a nasty habit of contracting a terminal case of the deads, and Booth finds himself X-filing the situation.

The penultimate story, "*The Green Glass Paperweight*," is another terrific piece that sheds light on our hero. It explores the history and nature of the tumultuous relationship between Booth and his cold, abusive stepparents, and the destructive power of hate.

The last story, "*Listening to Bone*," is very forgettable...so let's go ahead and forget it.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

This is a quality collection. If it wasn't for my lack of enthusiasm for the first 3 stories and the last one, the rest of the tales would have earned a solid 4 stars, with a couple of five star ribbons for my two favorites. However, judging all of the stories en masse, I will have to settle for a strong "I like it."

Thus, 3.0 to 3.5 stars. Recommended.

Anne says

I lurve Sarah Monette. Full review to come.

4 stars and a for sure re-read in future.

hedgehog says

Excellent collection of paranormal horror shorts - more on the end of psychological, unsettling horror than the splashy gore kind, which suits me just fine. The frame story in the introduction, complete with footnotes and convincing in-universe analyses of the stories? Super fun. Booth's narrative voice reminded me of Neil Gaiman's default meek-dude-recounting-mindless-horrors narrators, though Monette explicitly namechecks Lovecraft and M.R. James as influences, and I've no doubt Gaiman drew from them as well, so my real observation here I guess is... I don't read enough horror, pastiche & homage is a funhouse mirror, time is a wheel, etc., etc.

Favorites: "The Wall of Clouds", "Elegy for a Demon Lover", "The Green Glass Paperweight".

sage says

You know, the more I think about this book, the more I really love it. As stated elsewhere, it's a series of interlocking short stories in the life of Kyle Murchison Booth. It's set in some historically nebulous time in the years after WW2, but the protagonist is so NOT grounded in the physical world that the lack of a detailed setting works very well. The things he pays attention to are exquisitely detailed, and I love that because specific detail ought to reflect what the pov character cares about.

Best for my inner language geek is the phenomenal amount of word-porn in this book. Booth's narration uses old words, antiquated words, and words whose primary meanings have gone far afield from their rare usages -- which leads to some lovely poetic double readings throughout the book.

The ending (SPOILERS AHEAD) given in The Green Glass Paperweight was kind of huge for Booth and makes me wonder what happens next. We're led to believe he recovers some freedom to feel, but I'm not sure we see enough to believe in it. *ponders*

Isidore says

Discard at once the author's notion that she is retooling Lovecraft and M.R. James: in terms of imaginative reach there's little here that would have strained Mrs. Riddell, and there's no sign of James's startlingly unexpected imagery. It's easier to imagine Monette's pastiches as the work of a solid, second-tier Edwardian craftsman of the Weird.

But if the horrors to be found here are somewhat unambitious, they are laid out intelligently in well-told narratives. "Wait for Me" is particularly good, thanks in part to clever details, such as having an adult's collection of children's books eventually prove to be an indication not of puerile tastes in literature, but of a

sinister supernatural harassment. The nasty/pathetic revenant of that story gives it exceptional impact; so does the presence in "Wall of Clouds" of two old ladies who at first seem nothing more than a amusing pair of gossips, but whose increasingly ghastly chatter finally compels a surprising reassessment of their true nature.

Monette is a deft hand at turning the commonplace into the monstrous, and to that extent at least is a worthy follower of M.R. James, but her style and tone are her own.
