



Rules of the House

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Ian always follows the rules. His sister, Jenny, breaks them all the time-especially "Don't pinch." So Ian is thrilled when the house where his family is vacationing posts a tidy list of rules. But when Jenny breaks them all, the house itself decides it's time for payback. The rug, the stove, and the bathtub are hungry for rulebreaker soup, and they've found the perfect ingredient: Jenny!

Now Ian is faced with a thorny question: What if saving your sister means breaking the rules?

Rules of the House Details

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From Reader Review Rules of the House for online ebook

Martha says

Any sibling growing up in a family who is either a rule breaker, or rule follower will imagine this scary/funny title is written for them. The expressive animated acrylic illustrations bring naughty older sister Jenny, and little tattle tail brother Ian to life. On a vacation in a rustic log cabin the siblings read the sign stating the rules of the house: remove muddy shoes, don't leave a ring around the bathtub, replace used firewood, never, ever open the red door. Ian happily points to the rules, and pubescent Jenny bristles. Soon she's happily breaking all of the rules, sending her brother into a tizzy. When she breaks the last rule and opens the red door, scary monsters begin to appear. Alert goody, goody Ian immediately runs away. Yet, contemplating his sisters's situation he decides to break a rule of his own. This hilarious picture book will find wide appeal, not just with the early elementary crowd.

La Coccinelle says

So, as far as I can tell, the moral of this story is: be an anal little toady, follow the rules so hard you never have any fun... and then break them so you can save your annoying, helpless older sister.

I don't really understand who this was supposed to appeal to. The pictures are really well done, but some of them are downright scary. The message that it's okay to lie isn't a great one for little kids, either. But the story is so juvenile that it probably won't appeal to older readers.

What a weird little book.

Katherine says

I loved the art. Was thrilled with 90% of the story line. Enjoyed the humor and the sibling squabbles. Was intrigued by the forbidden red door! Loved how the furniture 'came to life'.

But hated that this book justifies lying. Literally the whole point of the book teaches that lying and breaking the rules is okay. I'm not kidding.

One of the last pages says this, "Thank you," said Jenny. "You're welcome, " said Ian. "You lied for me, " said Jenny. "So?" said Ian. "So isn't that against the rules?" "Don't be a toady, " said Ian.

Soooo glad young, impressionable children will read this! (sarcasm)

Disappointing Mac Barnett, just disappointing.

Molly says

Sometimes, you have to break a rule in order to be a really good brother.

I am gonna have nightmares about that monster bear-rug, though.

Miss Ryoko says

A creative and fun story - Mac Barnett and Matt Myers (who have worked together in the past) are a good match up!

Tasha says

Ian loves to follow the rules while his sister Jenny breaks all of them. So when they go on a trip with their father to a cabin in the woods, Ian loves that there is a list of rules on the wall. Jenny though, ignores the rules, breaking each one of them. The final rule is not to open the red door, which Jenny does. Nothing happens. Until later that night, when the mud-tracked bear rug, the dirty bathtub and the empty woodstove come into the children's room. At first, Ian flees while his sister is captured by the monsters. But he returns to try to help her. But it may mean breaking the rules!

This book is a delight. It's a riff on classic horror movies as well as Bluebeard with the forbidden door in an isolated house. Barnett keeps the tone light at all times, making sure that the book is just frightening enough to give shivers but not too frightening for young readers. The focus on following rules is turned on its head with the culmination of the story and learning that sometimes rules are meant to be broken in the right circumstances.

The art by Myers is dark and atmospheric. It plays up the horror motif with long shadows, a scratched up red door that looks like things have tried to break in, and objects that look like monsters even before they fully emerge as monsters. The long moment after the door is opened is drawn out even farther by the full double page spread, showing the quiet house. Wonderful timing!

A great just-right scary read for Halloween that is just creepy enough to enchant. Appropriate for ages 4-7.

Patricia McLaughlin says

Vibrant illustrations mask this imprudent promotion of bullying, lying, and general creepiness (the bear is simply grotesque, the bathtub nightmarish) in this farcical haunted house romp. Another example of shameless profiteering by the publisher, using the well-known names of the "New York Times best-selling" author and illustrator to sell this trifle.

Christiane says

Ian loves to follow the rules while his sister Jenny does not. When they and their father go stay in a rustic cabin in the woods, there is a list of rules that Ian scrupulously obeys. Not Jenny, who one night breaks the last rule: "Never-Ever-Open the Red Door". Nothing happened. Until that night. I loved this book! As a rule follower I have a lot of sympathy for Ian, and I appreciate how hard it was for him to break the rules, even to save his sister!

Desiree says

The rules of the house is an imaginative story about Ian a boy who always follows the rules and his sister Jenny who refuses to follow the rules. When a serious rule is broken, Ian must decide if he will break some rules to save his sister. This book started out well, but I didn't like the overall message of the book.

Dani - Perspective of a Writer says

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Ian is a great child who always follows the rules... but because this is such a crime a special house decides to teach him the BEST lesson... sisters who break the rules and pinch you shouldn't be expected to treat you decently... but YOU are expected to break your values to save them when they need it!!

Obviously my story premise is in my own words. I thought this would teach my nephew about treating people's things with respect and how to deal with someone who doesn't. BOY WAS I WRONG!!! The art was a culprit in that it is pretty cute in a dark and creepy way. It's not mind blowing art but it's fun and it got the message across that rule followers ought to be taught a lesson!

Boy was my poor nephew confused. He's a pretty good kid too and he sometimes allows kids to bully him because he's that nice! It's sad and painful to know that there are books out there teaching kids that bullying is a part of life and you just need to accept it. I'm pretty sure that was NOT the intended message. But when your sister continues to pinch you hard and hurt you after you BROKE FREAKING RULES FOR HER... that is called BULLYING. YES, bullying can happen to you from family members and its called ABUSE!

Another "great" message of the book is that lying and falling in line with a bully is the best solution. I CAN NEVER condone a book that TEACHES lying! Does it happen? YES! Can we stop a child from lying? NO! But we can certainly NOT teach them to rationalize that what they are doing is good. His sister brought those consequences on herself through her own actions. More power to the mad murderous bathtub and the crazy rabid bear rug out to get her!

We did find a lovely map page of the trails around the cabin that they go to that my nephew drew. It was his favorite page and had ZERO to do with the story. I can't condone a teacher reading this to a class and I would certainly NEVER recommend it for a home library.

BOTTOM LINE: Wrong on every level that matters!!

You can find this review and many others on my book blog @ *Perspective of a Writer*. See my picture book reviews in a special feature called Boo's Picture Gallery...

Dan says

What a fun and slightly creepy story!

Eddie says

What a wonderful marriage of words and pictures in this book about an "up tight" brother and hang loose sister (who likes to pinch) and how they come together (and learn not to be "toadys"). The value of a toothbrush is not to be ignored either. Mac leaves plenty of room for the pictures to tell the tale and Matt Myers does just that, adding details in his illustrations that expand the story. Lots for brothers and sisters to see here and for all to enjoy. Is there a lesson? Sure there is but you'd never know it, there's just understanding and love, and warmth and growth, on all sides.

Nancy Kotkin says

I'm a big fan of Mac Barnett, but the message of this picture book is that it's okay for a child to lie. Ian could have used ingenuity to help his sister instead. Also, the sister is downright mean to her own brother.

Jason says

I typically love Barnett's stuff and was enjoying this until the end where the message seemed to be that it's okay for kids to lie sometimes. I'm not typically a rule-follower myself and there are so many other rules that have much less serious consequences if they're broken that Barnett could have used to illustrate the same point. What a bummer, because otherwise this is a super fun book.

Gordon says

Mac Barnett is a fantastic children's author in my opinion. His most recent book, **Rules of the House**, illustrated by frequent Barnett collaborator, Matt Myers, and published by Disney/Hyperion, has all the hallmarks of a story that could likely be in the animated featured film hopper - a story about sibling rivalry glazed with just enough horror story elements that keep kids on the edge of their seats, ending with a nifty, although predictable moral. As illustrated by Myers, the book already feels like a Disney movie tie-in, but I wouldn't be surprised if there isn't a movie in discussion out in Burbank.
