



The scarecrow

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'The same week our fowls were stolen, Daphne Moran had her throat cut.'

Neddy Poindexter's sister, Prudence, has turned sixteen and is the prettiest girl in Klynham. Neddy can't protect her from the men in town, but can he protect her from the killer on the loose?

Part boys' own adventure, part small-town comedy and part horrifying thriller, *The Scarecrow* is of its own kind, an unexpected and irresistible masterpiece.

'One of the most unusual and original novels published in this country for many a long day' - Sydney Morning Herald.

The scarecrow Details

Date : Published July 1st 1976 by Heinemann, Auckland, New Zealand (first published 1963)

ISBN : 9780868636771

Author : Ronald Hugh Morrieson

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From Reader Review The scarecrow for online ebook

Jared Gulian says

A friend recommended this book. The first time I tried to read it, I hated it. I don't know why. It bugged me. I read a couple chapters then stopped. I tried to give it back to my friend and she say, "You hold onto it and pick it up later. I swear you'll love it." It sat on my shelf for 3 years. Then I picked it up again and LOVED it. It is a great story that kept me totally engaged. Funny how your head space at the time can change how you experience a book. I finally gave it back to my friend with a big thank you.

Matt says

it's meant to be a sort of crime thriller except it basically forgets about that for most of the time to focus on a pair of disgustingly stupid and hornt 14-year-olds and the absurd and grotesque characters in the town. which is probably good because the book has enough distasteful moments as it is, and it helps lift it above just another terrifying-stranger-comes-to-town story.

while a lot of it is clearly meant to be funny, the humour hasn't aged terribly well (or at least hasn't travelled terribly well -- either way i'm not au fait enough on life in 1940s(?) small-town New Zealand to pick up on any particularly sophisticated social satire). but the narration has an appealingly dry style to it, the dialogue is sharp, and on the whole the book is a really effective piece of modern gothic that's vaguely reminiscent of Bradbury's "Something Wicked".

Crawford says

ISBN 0 86863 677 0
Heinemann, NZ.

What an opening line! "The same week our fowls were stolen, Daphne Moran had her throat cut." The intrigue that Morrieson then dishes out to explain everything about this sentence becomes 'a macabre comedy in which horror and humour are blended so that shudders come as fast as the smiles' (from the dust cover). As in Morrieson's other novels, this is small town New Zealand at a time when poverty was the norm, day to day survival was reality and people did things because they could; the wild west has nothing on this landscape of lawlessness and the impression is gained that though a novel this plot is based on a grain of truth embellished by acute observation of the human condition; there is not a lot of good in mankind when the competition for living is so intense, and the communal spirit is more alive in an ants nest than a back blocks shearing shed. But all's well that ends well and though not everybody lives to tell the tale, Daphne's life, and that of the fowls, were not in vain. I agree with the publisher: 'This is a highly original, brilliant (if not dark) thoroughly readable novel.'

CJHD
27-Dec-11

Rebecca McNutt says

The Scarecrow is a powerful crime novel, but instead of literature's typical rugged detectives, crooked cops, enigmatic FBI agents and classy women, the characters are a young brother and sister who find their lives affected when stories of a killer lurking around begin to taint their town.

Jessie says

A very engaging read. I originally began reading the tale expecting it to be all about the murderous escapades of the ominous "Scarecrow". However I soon discovered that he was one of the least villainous characters in the book (apart from the whole murdering, necrophilia thing....yeah okay he was pretty bad). The Lynch gang on the other hand provided much more of a suspenseful terror. I find that I am able to handle a man that I know is intent on killing people, I find it much harder however to handle a group of naive adolescents who have adopted some very terrifying, adult ways of occupying their time. The entire novel was riddled with rich, in depth characters and narrated by a very dry, quick witted young lad going by the name of Ned. It was not so much a story of crime as it was a story of living in a hard time, in a hard place. I myself imagined the setting to be the New Zealand equivalent of an Australian 'bogan' or regional township of which I am somewhat familiar, therefore it was easy to imagine the kinds of people that occupied the narrative. In fact, the authors writing style was incredibly true to how many people I know speak. Just shows how similar New Zealand and Australia can be. Crime, growing up, learning about yourself. These are just some of the cliché descriptions I can use to describe the themes of the novel, yet it was much much more than that. Funny, sad, terrifyingly real, read it and find out for yourself.

Alan says

Don't let the humdrum title fool you... this is an incredible book! Ronald Hugh Morrieson was a very talented writer with a lot to say, and one gets the impression that "The Scarecrow" barely scrapes the surface. Had it been twice as long, I think it would still have left me wanting more.

Set in a small (dare I say, derelict) New Zealand town in the 1950's, this novel walks a fine line between quaint yesteryears and gruesome realities. The cast of characters run the gamut from loveable to despicable, romantic to pitiful. The leads are surprisingly complicated and very much endearing in each of their own ways, and Morrieson manages a great deal of depth in what could have been a fairly bland and uneventful narrative.

The writing style is to be congratulated. Readers will find it witty at times, but also harrowing and suspenseful. Perhaps most important of all, it feels genuine - as though a young boy could have experienced it just so, and not as though a grown man is hiding behind every line. The dialogue is a stroke of genius!

I would recommend this to anybody, being a healthy combination of themes without ever becoming too grisly or too dull. It moves along at a good, steady pace and the ending doesn't disappoint either (which can so often be the case). This novel was so good, it may even become a personal favourite when I get around to reading it again.

Jason says

Salter the Sensational stalks women in the small (fictitious) New Zealand town of Klynham in the early 1950s. This 1963 novel is told from the perspective of a teenage boy, Eddy, and the horror occurs amidst a backdrop of sleepy, frequently comedic, small-town life. The story opens with Eddy and his best friend Les's newly purchased chickens being stolen by Eddy's drunk Uncle Athol and raffled away. Eddy and Les mistakenly suspect the local gang of bullies led by Victor Lynch, and steal the Lynch family's chickens in a daring night raid. The rest of the story is filled with working class family dramas, and encounters (and fantasies) with girls. Meanwhile the necrophiliac serial killer (yuck) begins killing, and hanging creepily around the premises of the local undertaker, Charlie Dabney (also constantly drunk). This is a quirky, at times sickening, novel, more valuable for its amusing perspective on small-town New Zealand in the 1950s than as an exciting mystery.

Inita says

St?sts risin?s Jaunz?landes mazpils?ti?? Klinem? un st?st?t?js ir ?etradmitgad?gais Nedijs. St?st? ir draudz?ba, c?ni?i ar Lin?a bandu, seksualit?tes apzin?san?s, nelaiimes gad?jums un dažas baisas slepkav?bas, kas sace? k?rt?gu v?tru mazpils?t? un ?oti tieši skar Nediju. Viet?m v?st?jums š?iet t?ds neveikls, bet tas piedod tikai ticam?bu tam, ka tas ir ?etradmitgadnieks, kas to st?sts.

Tracey says

The novel starts off with a cracking first sentence 'The same week our fowls were stole, Daphne Moran had her throat cut'. From this starting point the novel settles into the viewpoint of Neddy Poindexter as he struggles with poverty, growing up, dealing with the family and a sinister man who comes to town. The book is set in a small New Zealand town and the family struggles, the town makeup are believable and anyone can relate to the setting. There are some wonderful descriptions in the book 'At thirty-six, her body was still youthful and lovely like that of Dorian Gray but the face was tall painting in the attic' or 'The grief of her family slit the tongue of every busybody'.

There is a lot to like about this novel as Neddy comes to grips with not just growing up but understanding just what evil is.

What I really liked was the ending (and not giving anything away) whilst it was nicely tied up, not every character came out smelling of roses and that was a lovely touch.

Read this is, as it is a gem of a novel.

Bert says

A brilliant, sometimes jarring mix of coming-of-age nostalgia, cartoonish horror and grim realism - a tale of lechery, alcohol, murder, rape, and small town charm. Think Ray Bradbury's slightly unhinged cousin.

Neddy Poindexter's narrative is a delight, a bit innocent and naive with a tendency to exaggerate and a kinda disturbing fixation with his sister. Through him Morrieson captures that horrible, mulchy mysteriousness of sex when you're a 14 year old boy, and creates a vision of small town New Zealand which somehow feels both sentimental, disgusting and eerily magical.

Siobhan Lamb says

Interesting enough but I mainly read it because I was stuck on a plane with not much else.

Lauren says

What a grimy, unpleasant book. Excuse me while I dramatically wash my hands of it now that I'm done with it.

Okay. So. The Scarecrow isn't a bad book, but there was a lot I didn't like about it. I suppose what muddied my enjoyment of it the most was the book's skeezy preoccupation (not to mention the protagonist's preoccupation) with the sex life of the protagonist's 16 year old sister Prudence. For me, Prudence was the only character worth giving a toss about, as the rest were too one-dimensional or unlikeable. Or both! The protagonist had his moments, but the scenario closer to the beginning that almost led to a (view spoiler) pretty much soured me on him for the rest of the book.

Reading the book was also kind of unpleasant. It felt like a fever dream at times. It's hard to describe, but a lot of the events that Ned (Neddy, Eddy, whatever) recounts just seemed to mush into each other. Maybe that was my brain trying to process the book faster so that I could be done with it.

But really, it's not without redeeming aspects. The titular scarecrow had a great aura of creepiness about him, and the Lynch gang that torments Ned and his cohorts were kinda terrifying as well. They reminded me of this gang of boys that me and a friend happened upon one weekend while walking through the local primary school. Actually, we met the "leader's" uncle first. He told my friend "*Nephew's name* would *love* you" in an awful, leery, knowing voice that bewildered my friend and I then and still creeps me out now. We edged away from the creepy man but further into the school we happened upon a gang of boys probably 4 or 3 years younger than us, who surrounded us and kept trying to touch my friend's arse. We were semi-amused, but weirded out enough to head home, and the boys proceeded to chase us along the street, still trying to slap my friend's arse. Now, those boys weren't on the same level as the Lynch gang, of course. They were more like a proto Lynch gang. I forget where I was going with this anecdote. I guess my point will now be that boys had a creepy sense of entitlement back then and, duh, they still do now. Even the good guys in this book have that creepy sense of entitlement to intrude upon girls. It was weird. But not surprising.

2 1/2 stars.

Liz says

I've just finished *The Scarecrow: A Novel* and I'm not sure that I'd recommend it. (Still considering whether to give it 3 stars and be generous, or stick with just 2.)

Although funny in places, more often than not, the humour didn't work for me. It felt too laboured, self-conscious, and at times, very uncomfortable (rape & necrophilia have never been particularly chuckle-some in my book....) It was written in the sixties, so the sexism is to be expected, but I did get sick of it. (Having read back over what I've just written, it's lucky to get 2 stars!!!!!!)

Edit: Just about to administer my measly 2 stars and took a look at the glowing reviews on Goodreads - were we reading the same book?

Tom Lichtenberg says

A sensational book, full of crackling live wire writing, adventurous inventive vocabulary and a story stuffed full of vivid and wild characters. It's classic noir New Zealand style, and as fantastic and great as any pulp fiction I've ever come across.

Eddy is a small-town youth, son of a useless drunken junk dealer and nephew to an even more worthless scoundrel, Uncle Athol. Buoyed by his best friend Les and sister Prudence, Eddy manages to scrape by in the dusty burg of Klynham. When a scary necrophiliac bow-tie wearing magician worms his way into town, he's just another stranger in this strange little world. It's every man for himself, and every man for the luscious young Prudence, who can't help but attract all their attention like a walking magnetic teenage whirlpool. It's just funny enough, and just scary enough, and just outrageous enough, to grab your attention and hold it closer and closer to the final flame.

Text Publishing says

'Had Dickens begun his career in the twentieth century and with a novel whose major theme was sex he might very well have produced a book like The Scarecrow.'

Meanjin

'Infectious warmth and gusto...one of the most unusual and original novels published in this country for many a long day.'

Sydney Morning Herald
