



## Floating Dragon

*Peter Straub*

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**Floating Dragon** Peter Straub  
**Two monstrous evils.**

This quiet suburban town of Hampstead is threatened by two horrors.

One is natural. The hideous, unstoppable creation of man's power gone mad.

The other is not natural at all. And it makes the first look like a child's play.

## Floating Dragon Details

Date : Published August 5th 2003 by Berkley (first published 1982)

ISBN : 9780425189641

Author : Peter Straub

Format : Paperback 595 pages

Genre : Horror, Fiction, Fantasy

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## From Reader Review Floating Dragon for online ebook

### Maciek says

After the success of *Ghost Story* and *Shadowland*, Peter Straub wanted to try his strength in tales that do not involve anything supernatural. *Floating Dragon*, published in 1983, was to be his final horror novel for a long time - till the 1999 return to the genre with *Mr X*.

As a novel, *Floating Dragon* operates on the ever familiar canvas of "horror in a small town", popularized in the 70's by *Salem's Lot*. While *Salem's Lot* was lean, swift and fast-paced, Straub's novel is much longer, much more complex, and stuffed up with much more things. I'm not putting one above the other, because aside from the same set-up they are as different as day from night.

In the introduction of my edition, Straub writes about his intentions and methods of composing the work. This paragraph perfectly illustrated what *Floating Dragon* is all about.

"Undead things in bandages, ancient curses, paranormal powers, the inanimate alarmingly animated, spontaneous combustion, visionary apprehensions, human beings uniting into ad hoc families to combat hideous literal evils, ghosts, ravaging beasts, beckoning mirrors, vampiric entities, external horrors, that whole gaudy blaring blinding circus of metaphor made real – at a level just below consciousness, I had decided to take my leave of all this dear, goofy imagery by wrapping it all together in one gigantic package and then... blowing it up!"

And as the man said, he did. However, as he later remarks, *Floating Dragon* is far from hackwork often associated with the potboilers of the genre: it's a set of slowly escalating set pieces, which in the end result in outright lunacy.

As a novel, *Floating Dragon* shows all of Straub's strength: his talent for characterization and mood, his great attention to detail and careful composition and escalation of atmosphere. The fictional small town of Hampstead becomes real: populated with all sorts of people with all sorts of backgrounds, who do all sorts of things.

The title, *Floating Dragon* is a gem in itself. It refers to Straub's unique approach: using *two* horrors, instead of one. The first is the poison gas which leaks out from a laboratory, a cloud of which settles over Hampstead. And the second...but I'll let you discover that on your own.

Although the paragraph from the introduction might sound a bit goofy, the novel itself is not: it's a serious, well-written work of fiction, bound to please anyone who's willing to suspend his/hers sense of disbelief. Straub's set pieces are captivating and populated by interesting characters, and although he makes the terrors he unleashes sound goofy they are anything but. The climax of *Floating Dragon* is indeed a moment of outright madness, but the journey there on the board of Straub's exquisite prose is worth it.

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### Squire says

A government experiment goes awry and a deadly gas is released over the affluent suburb of Hampstead, Connecticut. Meanwhile, the descendants of the town's original founders return to Hampstead for the first

time in over 100 years, igniting a firestorm of events that are the continuation of an ongoing curse.

After I read (and was completely scared shitless) by *Ghost Story* in high school, I was afraid to read anything else by Straub. I remember passing up *Shadowland* and this book; by then I was involved with reading too many other writers to be concerned with him. But rereading *Ghost Story* last year got me thinking about investigating more of Straub's work and the 30th Anniversary edition of FD seemed like a good place to start.

I was mistaken about that as this book was a huge disappointment.

I think the biggest problem with *Floating Dragon* was that it couldn't decide if it wanted to be a supernatural or science-gone-awry tale. It begins with a pretty good setup of a DOD experimental project getting released into the atmosphere and then becomes the tale of a curse over Hampstead that recurs every 30 years or so. Even as the two threads continue, they never mesh in any significant way--in fact, the narrator of the story decides that the chemical accident was merely a coincidence. So the reader is left wondering why it was needed to bloat an already over-wrought story.

Then there is the narrator of the story, a black-listed author of novels/screenplays who ex-patriated himself to England and alcoholism until the McCarthy-era ended. He begins his story in the third person, but then breaks in with a chapter of first-person narration to explain his role in the affair. He says he got most of his information from the diaries of the three other protagonists, but he may have made some stuff up himself--he's a writer after all, and he may not have remembered stuff very well. Then it's back to the third-person (though he does break in two more times for pointless POV narration.) So now we have a gleefully unreliable narrator to deal with.

Finally, the overall tone of the book is one of Straub being in love with his own writing. His unreliable narrator speaks as if he is smarter than everybody else in the room and he knows it. Add to this a setting of affluent people who feel they are better than everybody else and there's very little to care about in this confused and off-putting tale of death and destruction. In the epilogue to the story he talks about the narrator finally publishing "the excellent book *Floating Dragon*"--that actually made me laugh. But it just went to the overall arrogant and confused prose relating this tale.

There was about 100 pages (divided by one of the narrator's interludes) that were pretty good--those dealt with the main storyline of the curse, not the chemical accident. And I liked the climactic scene in the Gorge at Kendall Point. But overall, this was not a memorable reading experience. If you are a newcomer to Straub, start with another title--I recommend *Ghost Story*; if you're already a fan, you'll probably like it.

But Cemetery Dance's edition of the book is beautiful (I gave it an extra 1/2 star for that!)

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## Thomas Strömquist says

If Peter Straub should ever happen to write another book with Stephen King, then I'm sure to read something else by him. If not, this is where we part ways.

*Grindingly Slow Moving Dragon* was an ordeal and one of the few books in later years that I did finish despite feeling the way I did about the last 200 or so extremely dense pages.

But let's start at the beginning - the beginning was good, actually! This was suggested to me by my pro

reading buddy Edward Lorn (and there should be no shadow over Edward's expertise this time either - especially since it was me who should have heeded his advice and put this one safely back on the shelf when the time came, just as he did). I brought the book along for a short business trip that included two train and four flight transportations and I do think this was what got me quite a bit into the book in quite a short while and also, what made me enjoy it enough to keep going. The prose is of the kind that demands your fullest attention and attentiveness, you see. Very little is explained, the characters are not very defined and the stories take off in many directions at once. Already from the start I wondered about Straub's writing process for this book - did he himself have a clear understanding of where the story was going, a beginning, middle and end? I also wondered about his editor - did he have one?

The prose is dense (even the print is, in my edition there's very little white on any page and staying on the same one for a number of minutes of course adds to the feeling that you are creeping forward in the developing stories...). The narrative is good, if long-winded, until a strange grip in chapter 3 of part I:

*Instinct tells me that now is the time to emerge from the cover of the godlike narrator who knows what all his character [sic!] are thinking and doing at all times and[...]. Already, this pose has slipped, never more so than when I alluded to myself.*

This is, in my humble opinion, awkward, cumbersome and incoherent. Every time I happened to think about this, such as on any of the numerous occasions the narrator (obviously) talked about himself in third person, or talked very much in the third-person-omnipresent, I went: "Oh, yeah, how would this work then?" (Because - you know - it really wouldn't.) It's even more inexplicable as the 'device' is very little used - he talks in "his own voice" here for a very short while and then returns to it just once, near the end and the reason given is that:

*You see why I wanted to describe this series of events in the first person:[...] - Actually I don't - it would not have made any difference whatsoever to me. - why the pose of an objective narrator would have been no good, a lie to you and me both. - Which one are you, again?*

And there in my last question lies my main issue with this book: the characters... After more than 600 pages, I don't have one of them clear in my mind. Each and every one turned up horribly mutilated in visions and hallucinations so many times that I can impossibly recall who died for real and when. And what happens when you don't feel anything for the characters, not even that they could be real, you really don't care that much what happens to them or, it directly follows, how the story with them in it really ends.

Parts one and two were good (at about 160-170 pages each), probably due to my full attention (and the fact that my alternate reading material was the tax free catalogue) and somewhat moving story. The third part, clocking in at about 250 pages of molasses-in-December-moving story (not to mention the name 'Tabby' uttered a ridiculous amount of times - anyone with the ebook at hand that gets curious - please let me know) was akin to the work of Sisyphus (even if his was a bit varied as he had to go downhill once and again).

I don't consider myself a lazy reader, but with so many captivating and grabbing books in the world, I simply cannot see myself struggle through another one of PS.

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## **Paul Dinger says**

It was a really good potboiler. The biggest fault that I can see past the static characters is the confusing dragon itself. I don't think Straub really knows what caused this horror and his caricature of military and police types clashing has a real satiric thrill that should have been developed. But it was still a good read. I read reviews here comparing it to Stephen King's *It* (which is probably the other way around considering *It*

was written later) and *The Tailsiman*. I think Straub is in another category than King. His books don't blow the endings the way King's do. Further, his stories don't feel second hand. Though he uses familiar elements, they seem more natural and less forced than King's often do. This belongs on the shelf with his masterpiece *Ghost Story*.

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### **John Moretz says**

Too much backstory and exposition but not enough actual suspense and action to keep me reading past the half way point. I tried...

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### **Jack Tripper says**

As a pretty regular reader of the horror genre, *Floating Dragon* was one of the most original takes on the "haunted town" story I've ever read, and I'm somewhat surprised by the mixed reviews here. There's not much that's totally new here (as far as 1980's horror), but Straub puts a fresh spin on some of the genre's most cliched tropes: ghosts, zombies, ancient curses, chemical outbreaks, psychos, psychics, etc. His "everything and the kitchen sink" approach may be what rubs some horror fanatics the wrong way.

For me, it was a terrifying novel that caused a lot of missed sleep, due to staying up way too late reading, and to the horrible images stuck in my head while I lay in my bed, wide awake with no chance of sleeping. You actually feel for these poor, doomed people in the haunted town of Hampstead, where evil literally lurks behind every corner. That is a sign of a truly great horror novel.

It's also extremely well-written. Straub's prose pulls you in with such captivating imagery that never becomes distracting. I never really had to pause and try to picture just what the heck was happening amid all the insanity, it all just flowed so well. Each and every character had their own distinct voice, and I cared about what happened to them, while the atmosphere of tension and terror in the story slowly just builds...and builds...and builds...

Any fan of King epics that have a vast array of primary and secondary characters in a smallish town setting should read this. I warn you, there are literally dozens of main characters to keep track of, with stories somewhat independent of each other. For this reason, I would recommend reading this within a short span, or else it might be easy to lose track of what's happening with certain characters that might not have been mentioned in a while. But don't let that deter you. Stick with it and you will be rewarded with a story that will keep you absolutely horrified while reading it, eager to read more when away from it, and totally satisfied after finishing.

5 Stars

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### **DeAnna Knippling says**

This book feels like a scratchpad for a more developed book. I kept going, "I can't even," while reading this. None of it makes sense, none of it hangs together, it feels like a desperate not-knowing of what one is writing about. It is, in many places, something I wanted to toss across the room, it feels so clueless.

And then I finished it.

The ending makes no logical sense but is one of the more moving things I've read lately. A state change. It reminded me of *A Season of Mists*, *Sandman*, when the two dead kids refuse to die, Death says "Fine," and they realize that they don't have to stay anywhere forever, etc.

So in the end I felt the book was a brave renunciation of that which was no longer wanted or needed, a portal into the real mysteries. I have to approve.

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### **Benoit Lelièvre says**

This book was AMAZING. It's the kind of novel I was expecting to read when I've accepted Bob Pastorella's challenge of making a retrospective of Peter Straub's career in 2017 (I had never read Straub before).

FLOATING DRAGON is a sweeping supernatural horror novel inspired by the military paranoia of the 1980s. There are governmental secrets, transcendent grudges, transcendent horror and batshit crazy visions that plague an unsuspecting Connecticut town. What I like about Peter Straub is that he never really settles for easy answers. The monsters are never like, werewolves, ghosts or vampires. It's never convenient like that. The monsters are always man-made and everyone is always responsible for creating them.

Of course, like in other Peter Straub novels, there are way too many characters and point of views that keep crisscrossing, so it gets really confusing at time but it's forgivable for FLOATING DRAGON because there's an anchor point to all of the crazy stuff happening. One reason why they're all experiencing different terrors. In many ways it's a very conventional Peter Straub novel, but it's his most accomplished I've read so far. Really enjoyed this one.

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### **Eliza Victoria says**

Floating Dragon could have knocked my socks off, but unfortunately the novel's middle part got bogged down by too many abstractions, too much 80's horror imagery – the pulsing red light, blood everywhere, visions in various stages of decomposition. Granted that it was written in the mid-80's, but I'm reading this now in 2011, and it was just too much. Many times the horror becomes ridiculous, even cheesy, even laughable, far from the subtlety of his short story collection, *Houses without Doors*, for example.

But it starts and ends beautifully enough. The beginning reminded me of Straub's *The Hellfire Club* (which, by the way, did knock my socks off), with its huge cast of characters, its Gothic feel, invented history, and invented pop culture legacy referenced throughout the story (the show *Daddy's Here* in *Floating Dragon*, the novel *Night Journey* in *Hellfire Club*). The novel starts like a crime story: a woman named Stony Friedgood is found brutally murdered in the idyllic, middle-class town of Hampstead. But then the story gets a hint of scientific disaster: an experimental chemical called DRG is released accidentally into the air, and settles on the town. This chemical, when inhaled, either kills instantly, or turns the person insane. Did DRG just create a serial killer? All over Hampstead, birds fall dead from the sky.

Still, that's not all: when the town of Hampstead was built in the 1800's, a man named Gideon Winter arrives in town and brings with him a destructive force that will visit Hampstead time and time again.

It's worth a read, if only for Peter Straub's superb writing.

### Rebecca McNutt says

Peter Straub's take on the horror genre is always extremely imaginative, and *Floating Dragon* is no exception. The story of a small town gripped by a mysterious, subtle evil, this book is definitely a great one.

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### Edward Lorn says

DNF. Will return to eventually.

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### Anthony Vacca says

As an exercise in excess (which is what Straub admits to in his spoiler-ish introduction), *Floating Dragon* is a triumphant fireworks display that bombards the gluttonous reader with hundreds of pages of feverish horror set pieces. So infatuated with its own crackling prose and sense of narrative flair (the former more akin to the mannerisms of John Updike, the latter the self-referential glee of Martin Amis) the novel takes over 200 pages for its central storyline to emerge from a deluge of hallucinogenic, but deadly, hauntings, only for the plot to mostly be swept under again by even more tidal waves of blood. Readers unprepared for such an experience will recoil at the insistent brio and abandon, but those who are hungering for an experience similar to slowly swallowing a thrashing roller coaster will inch happily through this novel's beefy spine. The plot in a sentence? When the brutal murder of a woman in an affluent Connecticut community coincides with the accidental release of a sentient psychotropic weapon, four strangers are drawn together to battle an evil as old as America.

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### Venessa says

I don't quite understand the comparison between Straub and King: sure, they both write horror, but I think they have very different writing styles that I find it hard to explain. Straub is much more blatant with his psychological horror, whereas with King it kind of just creeps up on you. Both are equally scary in their own right. In a brief summary, this book is about a group of four people who must come together to fight an evil that has lived in their town for centuries. The evil hides under very guises, in this latest one in the form of a chemical cloud that is released from a top secret facility. One of the quirks of the cloud is that it fluctuates between instantly killing people, killing people slowly in a particularly gruesome manner, or driving them insane. All to mask the real evil that lives on. And perhaps will always live on....

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### Ignacio Senao f says

Muy parecido a IT. En un pueblo no paran de suceder durante años extrañas muertes y sucesos. Un trío tendrá que resolver que es, y para ello pasaran mucho miedo, con distintas situaciones de terror.

Vamos que el que se quede con mono de leer IT lo más seguro que esto sea lo más parecido que encuentre. Y

que se sepa que que está escrito en el 83.

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## Dirk Grobbelaar says

I keep on being drawn back to Peter Straub for my **Horror** fix. With this author it isn't just about the nasty stuff: it's about the presentation. *Floating Dragon* is a case in point: not only does Straub expose our fears; he toys with them.

### The plot in a nutshell

What you've got here is essentially a town that is periodically plagued by a sequence of terrible events: serial killings; disappearances; children dying under mysterious circumstances. This only happens once every generation and only the individuals who know the town's history exceedingly well are even aware of the pattern (they can be counted on one hand), the rest are blissfully ignorant. It's time for the **horror** to start again, only *this* time it coincides with an industrial accident that releases a bio-weapon that is still in a very unstable phase into the atmosphere. The net result is gobsmackingly macabre. The gas has a hallucinatory and psychotic effect (think military grade LSD) and in extreme cases causes an extremely grotesque disease.

### From the author's introduction

*Anything like restraint or good taste was verboten, the aesthetic was grounded in a single principle, that of excess.*

### Thoughts

Kudos to Straub. He never *quite* lets his **horror** become splatterpunk overly gory. This is good, because once you start gore-shocking your audience into submission, all other considerations (like, for example, good characters) go flying out the window. Like other reviewers, I would have to agree that this is quite a bit like It, in terms of the general feel and presentation of the story, although *Dragon* was published before King's novel.

*Floating Dragon* is better paced than the other Straub novels I've read. It consists of three set pieces, each one building on the previous, which helps maintain momentum. The characters are, as always, extremely well developed. It is a disturbing novel and *probably* one of the scariest I've read. Yes, there is a lot of weird imagery, but it is because the line between reality and illusion becomes increasingly blurred as the story progresses. It is often up to the reader to decide "what the heck just happened?"

It's as complete a **horror** novel as you're likely to lay your hands on, and quite clever, really. However, a word of warning, things get really, *really* weird towards the end. Total insanity and randomness might not be to everyone's taste. If you only ever read one Straub novel it should probably be *Ghost Story*, but if you read another, perhaps it should be this one.

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