



Other Words for Smoke

Sarah Maria Griffin

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Years ago, the house at the end of the lane burned down. The townspeople never learned what happened, but Rita Frost and her teenage ward, Bevan, were never seen again. Only Mae and her brother Rossa know the truth of what happened that summer—and they'll never say a word. When they were told they'd be spending their summer with their great aunt, Mae and Rossa were anything but thrilled. But nothing at Rita's is as it appears. Bevan is enthralled by a dangerous power lurking behind the walls of Rita's home. The power—known as Sweet James—is hungry, and what he wants most is a taste of the twins. And Bevan wants the magic and escape that Sweet James is offering her. But Sweet James is never satisfied, no matter what Bevan brings him. Mae would give Bevan almost anything—she is in the grip of first love, both dying for Bevan's attention and worried she'll get it. But Rossa is learning some of the terrible secrets the house is hiding, secrets that paralyze him with fear. As the summer draws to a close, Bevan tries to free Sweet James from his prison within the walls, but is thwarted by Rita and her cat (who is more than a cat), Bobby Dear.

It's over for Mae and Rossa, isn't it? They return home. They don't talk about the strangeness of that summer. But it never completely abandons them. And things at home only get worse.

And so three years later, Rossa and Mae are sent once again to Rita's home, as their parents' marriage finally seems to crumble. At first it seems that the strangeness has dissipated. But Sweet James never left. He has been lurking within the walls, waiting the perfect time to return. He's been waiting much longer than any of them know—any of them except Rita, who has been keeping secrets of her own. Secrets that bring the house down in flames around them and bring them all to the brink of the things they most want—and what they most fear.

Sarah Maria Griffin is a rare talent with a unique and atmospheric writing style. Fans of Maggie Stiefvater's *All the Crooked Saints* and Libba Bray's *The Diviners* will devour this dark and unusual novel.

Other Words for Smoke Details

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From Reader Review Other Words for Smoke for online ebook

Karina says

Just finishing Other Words for Smoke feels like falling back into this ordinary world from another, far stranger and scarier one. An extraordinary book - dark and beautiful and twisted and strange.

The closest comparison I can make is to Alan Garner's masterpiece, The Owl Service, yet this is uniquely it's own thing - just similar in magnificent gothic weirdness.

Sana says

Sarah Maria Griffin wrote Spare and Found Parts, the post-apocalyptic sci-fi about bisexual Nell with a mean streak and a mechanical heart so of course, I'm reading this book about twins and dark secrets and other interesting things mentioned in the super long blurb LOL

Jackie says

An interesting tale filled with magic, betrayal and the lengths people will go to get what they want.

“Other Words for Smoke” creates a twisted fairy tale like story when a set of twins are sent to live with their Aunt for the summer and upon their arrival they find that things are not quite what they seem with a game in progress between two forces with everyone who crosses the threshold becoming the unwilling participants.

This book creates a world where fantasy and reality sit side by side sharing a wall and the only way into the beyond is selling your soul to the darkness and it's almost like a cautionary tale as this force preys upon those at their most vulnerable offering them love and acceptance when they need it most.

There's multiple timelines in this mostly the first summer and three years later giving us a snapshot into the innocence of the siblings during the former as they are introduced to this house where the evil forces have already taken root and the latter when a far less obvious creature is feeding on the remnants of peace but by having them follow one another it was incredible to see the different roles each character played and how this affected the overall game.

It's so hard to review this fully because there's a lot to talk about but it's all spoilers! I have so many theories and want to analyze it in every form possible from a magic/with element to religion and everything in between so everyone needs to pick this one up when it comes out and we can discuss!

special thanks to the publishers and edelweiss for providing an arc in exchange for a fair and honest review!

Susannah says

Three and a half stars for this inventive take on practicing witches. For fans of Alice Hoffman who can

handle writing that's a little more grit and a little less whimsical, Other Words For Smoke presents a coming of age tale that makes you question everyone's motives. While the story follows our protagonists for a few years, a lot of the character development is left to the reader's imagination. Despite this, the creative mysterious elements kept me reading until the last page, where the conclusion was swift but enjoyable.

Thanks to Edelweiss and the publishers for this ARC.

Cayden Clark-Johnson says

This book has a solid story and great characters, but the syntax alone is enough cause for a read. The way Griffin describes the events taking place, with use of footnotes and wonderful figurative language, kept me engaged the entire time. Must read.

Gabriela Pop says

Yet another mindblowing novel from one of Ireland's most promising voices. Sarah really outdoes herself in this one. I'd loved her previous work and was highly anticipating this novel, so my expectations were set high from the get-go, yet it felt like they were somehow exceeded despite that.

At the core of it all, this is a novel about power, love, fear and the marks our actions leave onto the world, all interwoven with complex threads of family and magic. The book follows the story of a set of lonesome twins trying to navigate growing up, their eerie witchy aunt and her equally eerie house of mysteries and her teenage protegee who is trying to get a grip on that world of power and of magic. There may even be a couple of higher beings taking the form of animals looming over all of their lives!

The writing style is as enthralling as ever and the plot is so captivating that it takes no time to get into the story and wait for it all to unravel. It also feels so easy to get lost into these characters and their stories and to root for them to succeed one way or another.

Atmospheric,tender,spellbinding and unpotdownable. A true pageturner that will stay with me for a long time.

PERFECT FOR FANS OF SEANAN MCGUIRE,NEIL GAIMAN,HOLLY BLACK AND MOIRA FOWLEY-DOYLE

CW: A character is outed (confronted in the book),mentions of homophobia

Phillip says

I can think of books to compare this to, but seriously this amazing work of YA wordsmithing is unique. Part Haunted House, part coming of age, the tale goes from 14 year old twins coping with the slow falling apart of their parents marriage to the menace of a house possessed by ancient powers in the blink of an eye. Every character is carrying some kind of heartache, from needing to belong, to first love (or crush or lust), of their previously stable world falling apart, of long lost loves.

Mae and Roosa are shipped of to Rita's for the summer as their parents try to repair their marriage. Bevan, who lives there as well, will be the object of desire for both the twins, plans to use the desires for her own quest to find acceptance from the strange powers in the house. And for fear of spoilers I can not tell you anything about the owl or the cat.

As for the writing, amazingly lyrical, particularly when the narrative is from Bevan's viewpoint. For fans of Maggie Stievater's, Zoraida Cordova's Brooklyn Brujas, or Lauren Ruby's Bone Gap.

Charlie Anders says

This is a fascinating coming-of-age story with magical elements that feel both grounded and properly mystifying. Mae and Rossa are twins whose parents are slowly coming apart, and they get sent to live with their great aunt Rita and her teenage ward, Bevan, for two separate summers. They soon discover that Rita's house is no ordinary place --- it's one of those spooky houses with a mind of its own, where the rooms change shape and configuration sometimes. Plus there's a talking cat named Bobby, and Rita is clearly a witch (and Bevan is her apprentice.) Bevan is talking to a weird creepy owl named Sweet James who lives inside the walls, and Sweet James seems to have designs on Mae and Rossa. If you go into this book expecting a traditional fantasy novel, or even a traditional coming-of-age story, you might be disappointed--- (view spoiler). But that actually makes this book feel more like an accurate depiction of what it's like to be a teenager: you're full of passion and dying to take control of your own life, but adults still hold all the power in the end. Where this book really shines is in Griffin's depiction of teenage longing, the awful misery of being in love with someone who doesn't love you back, or outgrowing your old childish attachments. There are some gorgeous moments in this book that have stuck with me since I finished reading it, and the ending totally got me choked up. Griffin has a keen eye for the beautiful agony of adolescence, and that's what makes this book such a compelling read.
