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King's latest another disappointment



Needful Things by Stephen King

Viking Press, ©1991
690 pages
Hardcover price: \$24.95

★ 1/2

★ - throw it away, ★★ - a real disappointment,
★★★ - worth the time, ★★★★ - a real page-turner

It's sad but not surprising that Stephen King's latest effort, *Needful Things*, is a disappointment.

His most recent books, *Four Past Midnight* and *The Dark Half*, were similarly bad, consisting of contrived plots and flat, uninspired characters. And now *Needful Things* becomes the latest addition to what has become a streak of bad King books.

The book bills itself as "The Last Castle Rock Story," referring to the fictional Maine town that has been the setting

for a dozen or so of King's books and short stories. Castle Rock has been the home of a rabid dog (*Cujo*), a psycho cop (*The Dead Zone*) and four kids who walk some train tracks looking for a dead body (*The Body* and the film version *Stand by Me*).

In short, The Rock has been good — if a little strange — to King and his faithful readers, which is why it's too bad he chose to say goodbye to the town with a book as awful as this one.

The story's bad guy is Leland Gaunt, who opens *Needful Things*, a supposedly charming and quaint downtown shop. Gaunt's shop has anything his customers want — a personally autographed 1956 Sandy Koufax baseball card; a windup racetrack that picks winning horses for its owner; and a pair of Elvis Presley's sunglasses that magically transport a woman to sexual liaisons with the king of rock 'n' roll.

Gaunt's customers pay ridiculously low cash prices for their treasures. But in

closing the deals, the proprietor somehow manages to put the townsfolk into trances, where they agree to play evil tricks on each other.

The result is a stale and predictable — but very mean — round of evil deeds and sinister paybacks, resulting in murder, mayhem and a final, bloody clash between the town's Catholics and Baptists.

As the story muddles along, two feuding women go at it on a street corner with a butcher knife and a meat cleaver. A dog gets skewered with a corkscrew. An 11-year-old boy takes his own life with a shotgun. And so on.

Perhaps King is trying to make some kind of statement about people and what they will do to win and keep material possessions. But this is hardly enough to keep the story going for almost 700 pages.

Needful Things lacks the intricate plots, complex characters and subtle but sometimes powerful endings of other King novels. Instead, we get a thrown-together plot

and a predictable finale loaded with the literary equivalent of cheap special effects.

The people in *Needful Things* miss what King used to give his characters: personality. The one thing that could keep a King fan flipping through the umpteenth ghost and haunted car story was the characters. The reader could sympathize with them in *The Stand* and *Salem's Lot* because they were well-crafted.

The folks in *Needful Things* and other recent King efforts are lifted right out of a bad movie. By now, we expect a fright or two from his books. With the loss of credible characters, the whole thing becomes forgettable.

It's clear that after almost 30 books and God-knows-how-many short stories (most of them really good), King has either lost his quirky talents or just worn them down. Maybe some time off would do the Master of Horror some good.

By Christopher Blair
Emerald Editor

ANIMALS

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"It's a great way for the community to rally to a cause, not to mention that it's good exposure for the bands and an opportunity for people to appreci-

ate the local music scene and get a preview of up and coming groups," said Misha Dunlap, director of CARE.

Dunlap said last year's Animal Jam was a success, catapulting hopes for a better show this year.

"The animal rights issue is broad enough that though there may be many supporters, some buy into certain aspects where others don't depending on individual beliefs," she said. "But despite this split down the middle, the response and donations we've received for the benefit performance is an encouraging sign that more people are aware of the issue."

And the bands involved are not chipping in just for the exposure either.

"Animal rights is a much maligned and misunderstood issue," said Leo Schaefer, who handles bookings for Mission District, one of the performing bands who was also in last year's concert. "But though there may be differences in opinion, there's a general sympathy toward the cause. It's one of those lesser known issues that needs to be heard and Animal Jam is a good informative event for everyone."

Kevin Shapen of The Undertakers, a vegetarian himself, is happy that the band is involved. "This concert is a good thing," he said.

Ryan Tocchini, guitarist and vocalist with another group, International Anthem, agreed. "We believe in animal rights and besides, I doubt if anyone would support something they don't believe in."

Social concerns aside, the bands are also excited about playing together under one roof, especially since most of them have played together before at one point or other.

"This is a great time for the bands to get together and hear what each has to offer, and see how our distinct sounds compel the audience," Schaefer said.

"The range of music will be very wide and there'll definitely be something for everybody," Dunlap said.

Most of the groups defy any labeling of their music. The rule seems to be to go with anything and any sound they feel good playing.

Swing, jazz, punk or rock, In-

ternational Anthem dabbles in almost every style of music. The band moved to Eugene after a few years in Astoria to expose themselves to a larger audience.

Boogie Patrol Express came together initially to provide a positive model for elementary school children in this era of "gangster-style rap messiahs."

Today, with an original repertoire modeled after Finnish disco hits of the early '80s, the band says that, despite their upbeat sound, they aren't afraid to tackle serious issues such as animal cruelty, the Gulf Crisis and even nun-beating.

For "garage-inspired" rock 'n' roll, look to two of Eugene's popular alternative bands, The Black Dahlias and The Undertakers.

Hot Box magazine calls the Dahlias "the kind of band that really gets into not only what they are doing, but how the audience is doing also ... they just have a hell of a fun time playing."

Pat Yonally, a member with both bands feels that "American rock 'n' roll" is what drives The Black Dahlias, while he describes the sound of The Undertakers as "wild, chaotic and high-energy," inspired by such groups as the Miracle Workers and the Cynics.

Also into the experimental, mellow-heavy sound is The Medicine Wheel, a three-member band of University students.

On the more conventional end of the line-up is Mission District, who remain strongly influenced by the blues and R&B styles of musicians like Eric Clapton.

Advanced tickets are available at \$4 at Record Garden, WOW Hall, Sundance Mercantile and Face The Music. Tickets are \$5 at the door. Vegetarian food, adult refreshments and non-alcoholic beverages will be served.

Doors open at 8.30 p.m. and the concert starts at 9 p.m. with each band playing a half-hour set.

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