

She Said Destroy

Nadia Bulkin

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Bulkin's enormous imagination is on full display here: trippy, nightmarish, and unforgettable.

Nadia Bulkin's thirteen stories are as diverse in their themes as they are in their settings, yet they piece together excellently to showcase her skills. Their often grotesque imagery is the stuff of nightmares, but, at the same time, they are impossible to stop reading.

Bulkin plays with horror genre tropes in interesting ways. "Only Unity Saves the Damned" recalls scenes from *The Blair Witch Project*: a group of young adults take their camera into the forest in hopes of capturing a murderous myth on film.

From those woods to a ghost town destroyed by a mysterious gas leak to a conspicuously haunted hotel room, the settings of these stories topple typical horror expectations and rebuild them to house characters on personal journeys, many of which they never have the chance to complete.

Characters—even those who are dead and decaying—come alive in Bulkin's pages. The young woman in "Seven Minutes in Heaven" acquires tattoos of her sternum and ribs on the skin atop her own bones to remind her how she conquered her fear of skeletons. Max, in "Absolute Zero," suppresses his own dark urges to counter the disgust he feels toward his feral father. Characters become enlightened by facing the truly evil monsters that stalk their worlds.

Each story contains its own unique world, whose truths unfold over the course of its fifteen or so pages. The tales are often memorable for their gruesome imagery: a seven-year-old girl whose living corpse is slowly rotting away; the half-goat ghost of a previous babysitter taking vengeance on the new one; creatures who emerge from the sea to trade gold in exchange for the chance to create amphibian-human hybrids.

Three of the tales in *She Said Destroy* have been nominated for the Shirley Jackson Award, and deservedly so. Bulkin's enormous imagination is on full display here: trippy, nightmarish, and unforgettable.

AIMEE JODOIN (September/October 2017)

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