



The Unblemished

Conrad Williams

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Enter the mind of a serial killer who believes he is the rightful son and heir to an ancient dynasty of flesh-eating monsters. Follow the frantic journey of a mother whose daughter is infected with the stuff of nightmare, and look through the eyes of Bo Mulvey, a man upon whom the fate and survival of the entire human race depends. This apocalyptic novel set in London is an epic tale of history and destiny, desperation and desire, and atrocity and atonement.

The Unblemished Details

Date : Published June 1st 2008 by Virgin Books (first published August 30th 2006)

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Author : Conrad Williams

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From Reader Review The Unblemished for online ebook

Bo Ahlgren says

Clever and horrendously creepy tale of a modern Londoner hipster who becomes a willing participant in the awakening of an ancient race of doppelgängers who take over the sleeping city. When he realizes the magnitude of the situation, he becomes obsessed with reversing his role. Other fascinating characters traipse through the novel and end up colliding in the gory climax. Vivid prose, good pacing and tension, and unique personalities combine to form a bloody and gritty horror novel that isn't very predictable. Worth your time.

Arne says

Starts out as a creepy (albeit a bit slow) tale of possession (storyline 1) and running from a very bad guy with some very fucked up friends (storyline 2) , but later blows into (after very good characterization of the main characters) 28 Days Later by the way of The Fly with lots of carnage and gore. Conrad Williams goes all out in creating a nostalgic horror hommage of the 80's. His lyrical writing is just another plus.

Mike says

Full Review at my blog

If you think that sounds like a lot to be contained in the pages of one book then I absolutely agree. Weighing in at 367 pages Conrad Williams manages to craft a dense, taught narrative that reads like some kind of feverish nightmare. It is the type of book that renews my interest in the horror genre.

Paul says

Enter the mind of a serial killer who believes he is the rightful son and heir to an ancient dynasty of flesh-eaters.

Follow the frantic journey of a mother whose daughter is infected with the stuff of nightmares.

Look through the eyes of Bo Mulvey, a man who possesses the ancient wisdom a blood thirsty evil needs to achieve its full and horrifying potential – the man whom the fate of the entire human race depends.

At the beginning of this year I read One by Conrad Williams and I really enjoyed the stark, apocalyptic landscape that the author created. The subject matter was undoubtedly bleak but the writing was so strong I relished every page. I kept meaning to pick up more of Williams work but, as is often the case, other new releases clamoured for my attention and getting the opportunity to review his back catalogue moved further and further down my To Be Read list. Recently I have had a break in my schedule and this has given me the

opportunity to rectify this omission.

Bo Mulvey is a photographer who longs for some excitement in his life. He's bored of the status quo and a chance meeting in a pub seems to offer the opportunity of some much needed adventure. This being a horror it is no surprise that Bo swiftly comes to regret his decision as he is exposed to the dark underbelly of London's bloody history. His actions, however unwilling, are the catalyst that has lead to cannibals stalking the city streets. Bo becomes obsessed with trying to solve this problem without giving in to the flesh-eaters call. His grim determination to keep going against seemingly endless obstacles is gripping.

Sarah, the mother trying to protect her daughter from the horrors of the uprising, follows a similar path as Bo. She will do anything to keep her child safe. She has been on the run for months from a vicious debt collector and is trying, in vain, to lead a normal life. Circumstance draws her to our nation's capital at entirely the wrong moment. Sarah can't understand why a reclusive serial killer is obsessed with her daughter and how this ties in with the monsters that are on the rampage.

Where I felt the novel really excels is the descriptions of the flesh eaters infiltrating London. The author elegantly portrays a city slowly falling apart. The masses continue to go on about their business but the vast majority are blind to these horrific strangers appearing amongst them. Swiftly escalating, bloody violence begins to break out each night in the city streets as the flesh eaters start to make their presence known. As the thin veneer of society crumbles around them individuals finally become aware that something unnatural is occurring. By the time people sense that these creatures exist, masquerading as humans throughout the population, it is already far too late.

The survivors attempts to escape from the city provide some of the most tense moments in the book. Bo, Sarah and a few others manage to evade capture and try to flee. Their flight to safety becomes more and more desperate as dark forces surround them on all sides.

A word of warning – this book is most definitely not for those with a squeamish disposition. We are talking about hordes of cannibalistic humanoid monsters here and all the gruesome and graphic depictions I am sure you can imagine go along with it. Actually anything you can imagine probably isn't graphic enough. Williams lets his dark side have free reign here and there are some truly nasty things going on.

Over the years I have read a lot of horror and most of the time I enjoy it but once it's gone, it's gone. My thoughts on specific novels don't tend to linger. Up until now there have been very few exceptions to this rule – the early works of Clive Barker and Simon Clark's back catalogue to name a few. Based on my experience with *The Unblemished* it would appear that Conrad Williams has to be added to this select group. Few writers have the ability to genuinely unsettle me but Williams has succeeded here. Put it this way – up until last night it has been decades since I have had to take a break from reading a book because it was creeping me out.

If you consider yourself a horror fan and haven't read *The Unblemished* you need to remedy this situation immediately. Be warned though, once you read something you can't unread it. This one will mess with your head.

Mika Lietzén says

Conrad Williams channels early Clive Barker in a nightmarish depiction of London's last days. It's not a

sudden apocalypse, but a slow, barely perceptible corruption of the society, somewhat similar to the zombie invasion in *Shaun of the Dead*. One moment there are reports of graverobberies, then people get eaten on the street. The folks responsible for the calamity are the *Unblemished* of the title; an ancient race of humanoid creatures with perfect skin, perfect teeth and a somewhat ghoulish appetite.

The story follows several characters in turn: a photographer who's increasingly tainted by a connection with the creatures, a mother whose daughter came into contact with the nasties in the prologue, and a pair of serial killers. While the first two are well-developed characters whose fate can be cared about, the latter two are sketched more broadly and seem sadly more and more irrelevant as the story progresses. On the other hand, a group of the creatures who try to emulate human behaviour (taking names such as Graham Greene, Stanley Kubrick and Kurt Cobain) are a nice addition and one almost hopes they had been granted more time in the limelight.

The story is slightly uneven, with a plodding first third. It picks up after that for a very entertaining and fast-paced middle section, only to reach a quick and somewhat unsatisfying conclusion. However, the strength of the novel lies not in the plot, but in the ideas and the language used to describe them. Reminiscent of Barker's stories from the 80s, the imagery is gorgeous in its bloody, visceral decadence. Body parts are sawn off with antique saws, teeth are pulled and reinserted, syringes are eaten as a snack. This all results in a thoroughly dark and twisted atmosphere that permeates the novel and seems to worm its way into even the most innocent scenes. The menace is unrelenting, the world is constantly in danger of succumbing to forces that are brutally violent. It's a nightmare, but it's a fully realised, wonderfully detailed nightmare.

In general *The Unblemished* is a brilliant throwback of a novel that doesn't quite warrant a label as a masterpiece, but isn't that far off either. The good for the most part outweigh the uneven. Certainly worth a look for fans of Barker's *Books of Blood* or similar works from that period.

More reviews at <http://mikareadshorrorfiction.wordpress.com>

Trace says

Fortunately the author can write a good book, a very very good but... and here's a big but... I feel 100 pages could of been cut back due to the excessive descriptions about EVERYTHING. There was so much in this book that really in my opinion didn't need to be there. I seriously would of given this book 5 stars if it wasn't for that fact. I struggled with the last hundred pages and wanted to quit. Even the last twenty pages I wanted to throw it against a wall and that is really not me at all :-S

Mick says

Absolutely disturbing read, that takes a while to get going and will leave you scratching your head at times. The last third of the novel is amongst the best I've read in the horror genre. The prose is deeply unsettling at times, leaving certain scenes that will be etched in my brain for a long time

Jerrod says

Dark and visceral, the author doesn't allow you to imagine it yourself, he plunges you into his twisted vision and compelling story. I've not specifically read this release, which is supposed to be slightly different than the original release from Earthling Publications. But the meat and bones are the same [the author states that a few unnecessary characters and few 'edgy' scenes were removed]. From the beginning of the prologue readers will be riveted and intrigued at what is happening with a very unusual set of characters and how they will all eventually play together. It's like reading a H.R. Giger painting. Any fan of Horror/Dark Fiction needs to read this book.

Mark says

An intriguing book, grim and suitably horrific, I found I couldn't quite figure out my reactions to this novel. And I mean that in a good way. There were aspects to it that felt familiar from previous works of horror I've read, and yet it seemed to twist them into an unfamiliar and disturbing shape. Quite enjoyable, in a gruesome kind of way.

Rachel says

A mix of science fiction and very graphic horror. An interesting premise but very very confusing, still don't really know what was happening in this book. But if you enjoy flesh eating zombie alien stories then you will probly like this!

Joe Stamber says

While I liked the premise for this novel, I found it too hit and miss to rate it anything other than "it was ok". There were too many occasions when I was getting into a story thread nicely only to find Williams wandering off into nonsense. It was quite annoying that Williams had the ability to make me bothered about his characters only to break the spell by going off down a trail that didn't need to be there. A fascinating storyline and strong characters but too sloppily executed.

Joshua says

Allow me to start off by saying that Conrad Williams is brilliantly sick. He is twisted and disturbed. His work is so haunting you'll actually believe you're in a Edvard Munch painting. He is able to create a mosaic tapestry of the insanity of beauty and vice versa. Basically, **The Unblemished** is a wonderfully crafted lyrical horror novel that is a fantastic mix of the old and the new.

This is Lovecraft's *Rats in the Walls* meets Barker's *The Hellhound Heart* meets Hunter S. Thompson.

This will leave you with images that will haunt you for weeks. This dares you to read it and laughs in your

face as you slowly lose your sanity.

Is the book uneven? Sure. Many of the chapters go from the poetic to the prosaic, from truth to lies. The one true fault (or lie) is that by being so horrific, the novel at times feels cold and sterile, hardly producing protagonists that one can truly root for. Still, such are minor faults in the grand scheme of chilling perfection.

Tammy says

I think Conrad Williams is a gifted writer. His characters are complex, his narrative drips with atmosphere. And some passages were unsettling, scary, and delightfully gross. But I found the first 1/3 of the book to be sluggish. The different story lines were disjointed. It wasn't until half-way through the book that the narrative threads finally connected and the pace of the story picked up.

I think if you like Ligotti's and Gifune's atmospheric writing style, then you will also enjoy this author. In reading horror, I prefer a more tangible narrative, evenly-paced action, and immediate thrills.

Jerry says

Great book. One of the best horror books I read in ages. Very refreshing even though it's similar in theme to 28!

mark monday says

an excellent novel regarding the fall of london and the ancient, maggot-ridden, yet strangely sexy beings coming back to roost and to slaughter. Dirty Sexy Evil? well there isn't actually much that is sexy, unless perfect complexions and secret groin spikes are something that rock your boat.

the above description does an incredible disservice to the novel itself. reading the excitable descriptions on the back cover and within are also misleading: the prose is described as "muscular" and the novel itself is described by many (including the author) as a throwback to the horror novels of the 80s. i saw neither, and honestly i'm not even sure what "muscular" prose even looks like. hemingway? henry miller? anyway, the prose itself is dense and often surreal - strong in description, artful in delineating character, unafraid of describing a host of horrific and hallucinogenic tableau and mindstates. the plot is in some ways simple when looking at it after the finish: terrible things plan on re-invading london 600 years after their first visit, their compadres include two very different serials killers, and the folks arranged against them include an increasingly deranged photographer and the hysterical mother of an alien-impregnated young lady. well i suppose that sounds sorta 80s.

but it also does no justice to the robust storytelling, the often dreamlike narrative (an overused phrase, but spot-on in this case), the sense of our own reality slowly blending with a new and far more savage one, the many scenes of genuine terror and all-around horribleness, the poignant weaknesses of the protagonists, the ability of the author to create terrible landscapes of sadness, loneliness, and destruction, and the sheer ambitiousness of the novel overall. this is in many ways a poetic novel (another overused phrase), an exceedingly rich and dark one, and is up there with some of the best modern horror i've ever read. perhaps

the only weaknesses, the only things keeping me from giving it the highest rating, are that the horrors do not have a necessarily timeless or resonant quality, and perhaps too much time is spent with the dream-addled photographer when the upsetting realism of the hysterical mother's journey was far more palpable.

personally, i've always found adults with unblemished skin to be on the creepy side. how much money and time and effort have they spent on gaining that varnished look? it makes perfect sense to me that the unblemished who walk among us are simply the horrific vanguard of a hostile alien species. perhaps we should kill 'em all - just to make sure!
