



## **Husk**

*Rachel Autumn Deering*

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In this all-too-real work of horror fiction, Rachel Autumn Deering explores the mind of a young man who is struggling to cope with the effects of post-war stress, drug addiction, self-doubt, and loneliness as they manifest themselves into his deepest, darkest fears.

Kevin Brooks returns to his rural Kentucky hometown after a three-year-long tour of duty in Afghanistan. He has lost the grandparents who raised him, his lifelong best friend, and his trust in the government he once proudly served. When Kevin meets a kind, young girl named Samantha, he thinks his luck might have finally taken a turn for the better. But something else has its eye on Kevin. Something dark and brooding and mean. Something that knows Kevin better than he knows himself.

## **Husk Details**

Date : Published March 9th 2016 by Tiny Behemoth Press

ISBN :

Author : Rachel Autumn Deering

Format : Kindle Edition 102 pages

Genre : Horror, Fiction, Novella

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## **From Reader Review Husk for online ebook**

### **James says**

Tragic. Heartbreaking. Surreal. And damned scary. Highly recommended.

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### **Paul says**

Really enjoyed this mix of psychological horror and Appalachian noir.

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### **Audra (ouija.doodle.reads) says**

I was drawn into this little novella by the intriguing cover, and I am always attracted by psychological horror, so it sounded right up my alley.

The true-to-life elements were perfectly sculpted; I was completely with the story from the beginning with the description of Kevin's life as a soldier abroad to the fade to his life after and the trauma that is left behind.

Even though no one can see Kevin's wounds from the outside, he is scarred by his experiences, experiencing loneliness, crippling self-doubt, and issues with medications that leave him in need of help that no one seems willing to offer, which is probably the true horror of this tale.

When he begins seeing something lurking outside his house, is it really any surprise? What's real and what isn't? Is it in his head? Is it PTSD?

Where the narrative lost me was with the relationship between Kevin and Samantha. It felt so unrealistic to me, so rushed, underdeveloped, and leaving me feeling like it was Samantha who was the husk instead of Kevin since she felt more like a cardboard cutout rather than a real person adding import to the story.

I think their story could have been fleshed out more, and I could actually imagine this as a much longer work, delving into the psychology of his mind and how it affects those around him as the horror in his mind mounts.

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### **Alex findingmontauk1 says**

I finished 15 minutes ago and I am still jaw-dropped like whaaa?! 5 stars! I need more of Rachel Autumm Deering in my life! I loved the way she built her characters up down to the dialect and how the characters acted. I grew up Southern Baptist with a preacher in my family so a lot of this rings close to home! Deering did a fantastic job in exploring PTSD post-war, drug addiction, and one man's re-entry into the real world. I loved the flirty romance between Kevin and Samantha and just loved this novella. That. Ending. Ugh!

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## **Jeremy Maddux says**

That was it? All that Brian Keene hype behind this? It's barely a horror novel. I'll give it credit for a nice finish, though I won't call it an ending. I think many will rate this five stars because Keene liked it and because it has a female main character in love with a combat veteran, all the essential ingredients for positive critic reception. I wasn't impressed.

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## **Brian Keene says**

This novella is a phenomenal debut -- one of the strongest horror debuts in quite some time. Deering channels the spirit of Jack Ketchum, but her voice is strong and her own. Highly recommended.

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## **Kati says**

I loved this story. It was super creepy, with the perfect amount of facts laid out and just enough left to my imagination.

What I enjoyed most is how the author makes the reader genuinely feel scared, and sometimes sad, through really well-done writing. I felt the emotions of the characters, especially Kevin, without feeling like I was being figuratively slapped in the face with them. I didn't need any of the characters to say "I feel sad/scared/etc" I just knew they were sad/scared/etc, mainly because I felt whatever emotion they felt at any given point in the story.

The one thing I wish had been done differently is the relationship between Kevin and Samantha. I wish more of the story had focused on the progression of their relationship and, subsequently, the progression of the monster; it all felt a little too rushed. The story up to both Samantha and the monster's introduction was good but it felt like too much build up for the role it played in the rest of the story (if that makes sense).

Still, this is a quick, creepy read that I definitely recommend to anyone who is a fan of horror.

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## **Bill says**

There is a darkness that has loomed over Kevin Brooks life ever since he came back from the desert of Afghanistan. It lives in the shadows that surround him.

It is smiling.

It wants to destroy everything that he is. Everything that he loves. It won't stop until there is nothing left...

...but a husk.

A superbly written, tightly executed work with spot on characterizations and a heartbreaking and terrifying plot line.

4.5 Stars rounded up to 5 because there was a whole lot accomplished here in short format. Excellent job. Looking forward to more from Rachel Autumn Deering.

*From somewhere inside the room, he heard it laughing*

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### **Glenn Rolfe says**

#### **Different, yet familiar. Give it a try**

A US vet comes home to the house his grandparents raised him in, but something dark awaits. Is this creature he's seeing real? Or has the war ruined his mind?

The romance in here feels like a supernatural Hallmark movie, but it works.

I loved the ending.

Definitely worth your time.

I give HUSK 4 stars!

Deering is an author to keep an eye on.

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### **Frank says**

Wow. Rachel Autumn Deering's HUSK is some dark O'Henry-like storytelling. It's the type of story that has you turning the page with interest and anxiety. Though HUSK is a fairly short novella, it need not be longer than it is. It's short and its bitter sweet and that's what it needs to be.

I found myself drawn through this story quickly. At the outset, I turned the pages out of interest in the characters and their relationship. By the middle of the story I was turning the pages, anxious for the monster to reveal itself. In the end, I was turning the pages in horror not wanting to read what I knew was inevitable.

A glorious read. I haven't been whisked through a story out of necessity to find out how it plays out in quite some time. It's a nice feeling and yet the story is dark. This one will definitely dance on my psyche for awhile. I'm sure I'll get the chills when I can feel again.

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### **Carissa Lynn Reads says**

First off this cover caught my eye right away! I saw it and knew I needed this book. I sat down with it last night and pretty much read the whole thing in one setting! I'm not sure if I would consider it horror, there are definitely some dark parts and let me say I absolutely loved this story!! I don't want to give away spoilers but there were some nice surprises in here and I really enjoyed the writing style.

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## **John Collins says**

Husk is not only really, really good, it's also very important. Rachel Autumn Deering has given us a lean, mean novella. Not a word is wasted in this story of Kevin, an Afghanistan war veteran who has returned home after a horrific war time event. Suffering from PTSD, he faces one hurdle after another. Loneliness, despair and grief, when a chance for happiness opens up for him, unknown forces do their best to ruin it. Deering makes every word count, nothing is wasted or used as padding. She describes the hopelessness of PTSD and the uselessness of the government's treatment of returning soldiers.

A lot of this story could be based on real life events, I'm not sure if it was based on true events, it definitely feels real and that should bother all of us.

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## **Frank Errington says**

About two years ago, I met Rachel Autumn Deering at a Horrible Saturday event at the York Emporium used book store. I picked this up at the time and it kinda got buried on my ever-growing TBR pile and just never got read. Today, I finally corrected that error.

This novella is one of the most compelling and heartbreaking things I've read in recent memory.

Husk is some damn fine writing. The kind that gets under your skin, makes you think, makes you downright angry. Just because our servicemen and women come home doesn't mean the battles have ended. For many, they have just begun...

"They got me seeing a doctor down to the VA hospital every few weeks. Poking and prodding and asking me all kinds of questions a man hopes nobody would ever ask him. Keeping me doped up and all, trying to put me back together, I guess. I got a pill to help me sleep, one to perk me up, one to calm my nerves, and one to make sure I don't just fly plumb off the handle."

A tragic tale that left me reeling.

Strongly recommended.

Husk is available in both paperback and Kindle formats. If you subscribe to Kindle Unlimited you can read it at no additional charge. Also, if you are an Amazon Prime member you can read it for FREE using the Kindle Owners Lending Library.

From the author's bio - Rachel Autumn Deering is an Eisner and Harvey Award-nominated writer, editor, and book designer from the hills of Appalachia. Her debut prose novella, Husk, was published in 2016 and drew praise from critics and fellow writers alike. Her upcoming novel, Wytchwood Hollow, is set for publication in 2018.

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## **Michael Hicks says**

Rachel Autumn Deering has worn various hats in the comic book side of literature, and makes her prose debut with HUSK. Based on the strength of this novella, I'd say that's a pretty smart move and I'm hoping to see more works in this vein from her soon.

HUSK is a psychological horror story with some well-sketched characters. Kevin is a war veteran, recently home from Afghanistan and undergoing treatment for PTSD until the VA cuts off his disability checks. They claim he is addicted to the pills they have prescribed him to treat his clinical depression. Kevin doesn't truck well with being told he's a drug addict and goes cold turkey on the meds. Maybe not the best idea ever.

Deering gives us a terrific look at how Kevin copes with PTSD, or doesn't in some cases. He's still plenty shell-shocked, and the tension is only heightened further when something strange begins lurking around his farmhouse, stalking him in the night and threatening his new-found love interest.

This is a work of horror where the people come first and foremost, and Deering takes her time making Kevin and Samantha real, devoting plenty of time to developing their burgeoning relationship.

If I have to pick nits, it's going to be with some of the dialogue and a few technical issues on the writing side. Some it feels a bit too much on the nose, particularly Kevin's rant early in the book when he rails against the VA and his doctor. There's also some wicked POV shifts that took me off guard, where we're with Kevin and then suddenly being told about what's happening inside the neighbor's home, which he could have no knowledge of. These are certainly issues that can be ironed out over time, and aren't exactly surprising to see in a first-time prose author. None of these issues break the story though, nor did they detract from my enjoyment of the work.

And besides, that ending...oomph. Nicely done, that.

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## **Stephen Kozeniewski says**

Outside of a month I spent at Ft. Knox in 2004 and watching the entire run of "Justified" I don't know much about Kentucky. From my position of (admitted) ignorance, Deering's portrait of a rural Kentucky barely-town seemed vivid in its verisimilitude.

For those of you (like me) who despise trying to decode attempts at transcribing dialects (think Jar Jar Binks: "Meesa no habba da boomba") you'll be pleased to know that all the Kentucky twang is reflected in syntax and word choice. For instance, one character said something like "kindly go down to the gettin' store" which is perfectly charming and evocative, especially when it could've been "kinely git down to da gittin' stoh" or some other such nonsense Faulkner would've made me wade through.

Beyond the dialogue, Deering has an elegant way with prose, painting vivid portraits with a severe economy of word choice. I'm kind of shocked that someone with a background in a visual medium like comic books is capable of this, but perhaps I've misunderstood the tools required for writing comics. As a contemporary crafter of prose I can only compare Deering to Kimberly G. Giarratano, who up until now I had considered without peer.

Now to the meat of the story, so to speak. Kevin Brooks is a veteran returning from Afghanistan to the aforementioned barely-there Kentucky town. He quickly learns how terrible dealing with the VA is (which rang true) and when he is told he is addicted to the drugs the Army ordered him to take - an all too real, all too common catch-22 situation - he tells off his doctor and stops taking his pills. For the rest of the book, Kevin is haunted by dark dreams and a creature which may be a real monster or may simply be the product of his untreated PTSD.

I was diagnosed with PTSD, which is not something that I like to talk about, but it's not exactly secret either. Deering's portrait of someone being haunted by something, just out of the corner of the eye, seemed sharp to me. And I particularly appreciated the explanation of the titular term "husk" - well, one interpretation of it, anyway - as one of my personal symptoms is a "flat affect."

I was not so impressed with the (admittedly brief) depiction of Kevin's time in Afghanistan. I always feel like a broken record complaining about this sort of thing, and maybe I should just stop reading books about the military with such a critical eye, but there were things like Kevin calling an NCO "sir" and Afghanistan "the sandbox" (and implying that it was a desert country) or that, as a wrecker driver he had killed twenty guys, I dunno, it just took me out of the story. And then the platoon sergeant was ordering around Bravo 16, which would've been his boss, and then they were calling one vehicle "Bravo 16" and the other one just "Wrench" instead of "Brave Wrench"...I should probably stop now. It's a shame, though, because considering the care that went into the exploration of psychology, the charming love story, and the rural Kentucky background, a little more work on the first chapter could've made this novella flawless from start to finish.

In any case, if you're not an impossible-to-please vet like myself, you can probably just ignore that entire last paragraph. HUSK is, regardless of small flaws, a chilling, haunting novella, and as a prose debut I think it signals quite a career to come for Rachel Autumn Deering.

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