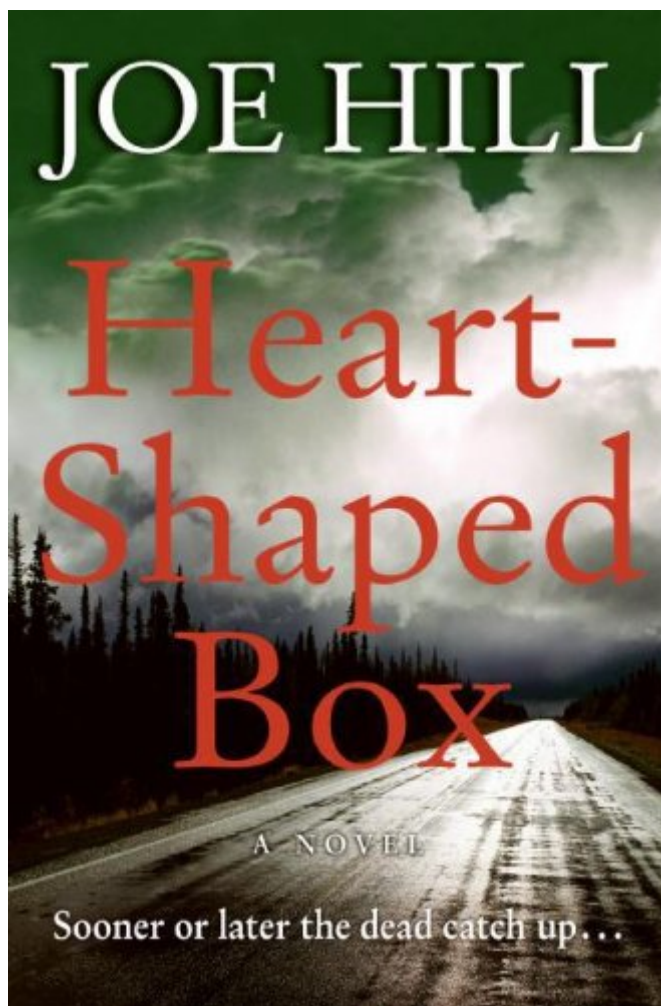


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Heart-Shaped Box: A Novel



Synopsis

Judas Coyne is a collector of the macabre: a cookbook for cannibals . . . a used hangman's noose . . . a snuff film. An aging death-metal rock god, his taste for the unnatural is as widely known to his legions of fans as the notorious excesses of his youth. But nothing he possesses is as unlikely or as dreadful as his latest discovery, an item for sale on the Internet, a thing so terribly strange, Jude can't help but reach for his wallet. I will "sell" my stepfather's ghost to the highest bidder. . . . For a thousand dollars, Jude will become the proud owner of a dead man's suit, said to be haunted by a restless spirit. He isn't afraid. He has spent a lifetime coping with ghosts—of an abusive father, of the lovers he callously abandoned, of the bandmates he betrayed. What's one more? But what UPS delivers to his door in a black heart-shaped box is no imaginary or metaphorical ghost, no benign conversation piece. It's the real thing. And suddenly the suit's previous owner is everywhere: behind the bedroom door . . . seated in Jude's restored vintage Mustang . . . standing outside his window . . . staring out from his widescreen TV. Waiting—with a gleaming razor blade on a chain dangling from one bony hand. . . . A multiple-award winner for his short fiction, author Joe Hill immediately vaults into the top echelon of dark fantasists with a blood-chilling roller-coaster ride of a novel, a masterwork brimming with relentless thrills and acid terror.

Book Information

File Size: 2630 KB

Print Length: 402 pages

Publisher: William Morrow; 1 Reprint edition (October 13, 2000)

Publication Date: October 13, 2000

Sold by: HarperCollins Publishers

Language: English

ASIN: B004O0UTVM

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #18,523 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #65

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Suspense > Ghosts #79

Customer Reviews

Debut novelist Joe Hill throws out the horror playbook with this modern spin on the traditional ghost story dubbed Heart-Shaped Box. The only thing that aging death-metalist Judas Coyne loves more than sleeping with pretty Goth chicks half his age is collecting macabre memorabilia, from Mexican snuff films to cookbooks for cannibals. Naturally, when Jude's doting assistant tells him about a bonafide ghost being auctioned online in the form of a dead man's garish suit, Jude didn't think twice about this ghastly purchase. No sooner does the suit arrive that he and "Georgia" Jude's latest in a succession of pierced twenty-something admirers he christens by their respective homegrown states are mercilessly terrorized by the vindictive ghost of Craddock McDermott, stepfather of a young groupie that Jude tossed aside before she committed suicide (seemingly over being callously discarded by the self-indulgent rock star). Craddock, a skilled hypnotist and dowser in his former life, uses his amplified powers of persuasion to wage war on Coyne's sanity, by urging him to murder Georgia and his faithful dogs. As Jude and Georgia hit the road with Craddock hot on their heels in his ghostly pickup truck, Jude realizes there's more to this vendetta from beyond the grave than meets the eye...and Jude will be forced to confront not only this sexagenarian poltergeist, but himself as well. Author Joe Hill may be the new kid on the block, but his ability to fashion brisk, tight prose demonstrates both a mastery of the English language and a sheer vivid imagination. By now, most readers are aware that Joe Hill (né Joseph Hillstrom King) is the progeny of undisputed horror master, Stephen King. After reading Heart-Shaped Box, it's markedly clear that when it comes to writing quality horror, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Hill's literary style and hard-hitting voice are remarkable; and his uncompromising, fully-realized characters serve to anchor this paranormal plot firmly in reality. Hill possesses both a clear knack for manifesting complex, tormented characters that stick with readers even when they (the readers) would prefer otherwise, and an aptitude for illustrating just how scrupulous humans can bring devastation to those whom they ought to hold nearest and dearest. Judas Coyne is a standout character so human in his imperfection and a far cry from the usual clueless horror-fiction protagonist. While most readers will find it difficult to relate to Jude Coyne, this loathing, out-to-pasture musician is an

anti-hero worth rooting for. That goes double for Georgia who's armed with enough spunk and sharp one-liners to make her more than just a shallow ex-stripper with piercings in all the wrong places, but rather a likeable character that one hopes will come out on the side of redemption after this horrifying and painful journey. Heart-Shaped Box doesn't read like a rookie effort. Early passages featuring the ghostly old man with black, scribbled-out eyes lurking in the shadows of Jude's rural New York fief are rife with tension and sure to get under one's skin. This satisfying debut is as hair-raising as it is multilayered. Horror aficionados will definitely want to take a spin on that nightroad!

I've read many horror / suspense stories and seen almost every movie in that genre but I have to say that Joe Hill is one of the best authors I've had the pleasure of being scared by! To say that this story is packed with action and fear would be an understatement. He really had me guessing about the outcome of the main characters' futures as you can never really predict what's coming next. There's no need to compare Mr. Hill to the other great horror authors but he can stand proudly alongside all of them, I think. It's original, frightening, and downright chilling at times but it also contains a faint glimmer of hope throughout. The characters are very original and sometimes make unlikely heroes which made them occasionally hard to cheer for. When purchasing this book, I thought I was taking a chance on an unknown author, at least unknown to me, but it was definitely worth the risk. I hope this author proliferates and writes many more books as this one was most assuredly as excellent as they come.

Jude is a 50 year old plus retired metal musician whose music still is loved by the teen and pre-teen crowd. In turn, he loves them. A lot. And each one for a brief period of time. He seems to focus on those who have been hurt, perhaps by parents, perhaps by society in general. Eventually somewhere in the relationship the girls bore him. He sends them away, but he made a mistake with Anna (aka Florida). She killed herself and Sister Jessica blames Jude. She decides that there must be revenge; Jude must pay with his life. The instrument for vengeance will be the father of Anna and Jessie. But he is dead. No problem, Jessie will just send her father's ghost to Jude; a wrathful father will, for revenge, take Jude's life. When the ghost first appears, Jude is with his latest girl, Marybeth (aka Georgia). She feels an imminent separation is coming, although she is still in love. She becomes an important ally of Jude's in the fight with the ghost. Other important allies are grandma Bammy, a couple of dogs, and

Jude's comatose father. Father Craddock (the vengeful ghost) is not the only ghost popping in and out of the sensibilities of Jude and Georgia. There is also Anna, Craddock's daughter who committed suicide. There is a lot of shifting realities between inhabitants of the dead and the living. The shifting is sometimes aided and sometimes inhibited by music. This is a very fast moving story that demands reader attention. When there are so many strange and weird things happening at the same time, I tend to read faster. That is not something to do with this book. There are many important clues and seemingly off-hand comments that are not hidden in the story, but they seem to occur in the middle of fast action segments. It was easy for me to miss them and I found myself going back to make some connections. And then there is the humor which I found mostly in dialogues. It was quite, and well, understated and dry, or even droll. I frequently stopped just to appreciate some of the humor. After finishing this book, I read the preview pages for other Joe Hill books. I was pleasantly surprised to see that they were not just clones of Heart Shaped Box. This led me to the author pages and more Joe Hill books. I recommend this for the genre "weird."

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