



## The Evolutionist

*Rena Mason*

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## **The Evolutionist** Rena Mason

At night, down-to-earth Las Vegas socialite, Stacy Troy, dreams that everyone is dead. Nosebleeds and head-splitting alarms only she can hear become a regular occurrence. In her nightmares, Stacy dismembers bodies, stuffs them into a shopping cart, then takes them two at a time to the pile where she will burn them and say her last goodbyes.

Waking nightly to her own screams, Stacy is convinced she's on the brink of a mid-life crisis and begins secretly seeing a psychiatrist. But as eerie as Dr. Light may be, his treatments work and her circumstances improve. Until the nightmares return with a vengeance taking on a life of their own. Still uncertain what to believe, Stacy carries on living the only life she remembers. But her other, nocturnal world refuses to die. The images it shows her hold clues that lead her to a shocking discovery, threatening to unravel the last thread of her sanity and Stacy must make a heartrending decision...

Before her post-apocalyptic nightmares come true.

## **The Evolutionist Details**

Date : Published January 2013 by Nightscape Press LLP

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Author : Rena Mason

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## From Reader Review The Evolutionist for online ebook

### **M.L. Roos says**

It's been well over ten days and thirteen books ago that I finished The Evolutionist and I cannot get that story out of my head. Between the taut prose, the clever turning of a phrase, the Stepford-esque clique of friends and the degradation of Stacy's mental health, it all fits together beautifully like a hermetically sealed Rubik's Cube.

This story brought so many memories to mind; the fifties housewives with a twinge of Patrick Bateman from American Psycho as to who could outdo whom, The Twilight Zone, and, of course, Outer Limits. Now by reading this, you are likely thinking this cannot be good. But it is. It is brilliant.

The nuances and control Mason has over the words she has chosen reflect how brilliant a story can be and how it continues to haunt the reader much longer than when you have read, the end. I am really hoping there is a sequel to this, because it cannot end like it did.

One of the best things I have read this year.

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### **C.W. LaSart says**

I finished Ms. Mason's first novel last night and have spent the entire time since, thinking about it. It is a rare thing for an author's first novel to be a win for me, but she really hit it out of the park.

I will admit I was a bit leery at first. It's written in First Person Present Tense, a style that I will admit I hate, but it only took about two pages for me to be completely over the style choice and immersed in the story. The dialogue is crisp and realistic, her transitions superb. The narrative flows in a way that makes it hard to put down. Even with all that, I was unaware just how subtly she'd made me care for the characters until the last 15 pages. I'm not ashamed to say I wanted to weep as I came to the powerful end.

This novel caused me pain. It brought up emotions in a way that no book has for me since adolescence. I couldn't recommend it more. The Evolutionist is a must for female horror fans, but males will enjoy it as well. It's exciting, touching, and horrifyingly real. Five stars for Rena Mason. I'm a new fan!

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### **Simon Gosden says**

A Stoker award winning debut novel but once again it didn't really do it for me. It's a sort of "Sex in the City" horror novel. Stacy Troy, yummy mummy and socialite, is having nightmares wherein everyone is dead except her. Her life starts to unravel as the full horror of what's happening begins to become apparent.

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### **Jeremy Maddux says**

Five stars for everything up to and including the big reveal. Two stars for the final act where the plot just dies down to a whimper with no real verve to it.

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## **Vincenzo Bilof says**

The Evolutionist is a title that seems to serve a two-fold purpose; one is the obvious plot element (no spoilers), and the other is the evolution of people from the hollow projections of themselves.

This review is going to examine some of the more critical aspects of the piece. First, the dialogue can be perceived as mostly filler, and horror fans might be looking for more “action” in the story, especially moments that take place outside of the dream sequences. The characters in this story are hollow in the sense that Brett Easton Ellis wrote about his hollow characters when he depicted the people who populate the Los Angeles “upper crust.” These characters are all outwardly hollow and fake to each other, including the protagonist, who is even fake to her husband and children. These are people who live behind lies, and thus we have the de-evolution of humanity within these people, and the evolution of our protagonist. Readers won’t care about these characters, because we’re not supposed to. The personal horror element to this story is our protagonist’s awakening to identity-realization, which usually takes place in moments where she is alone or with the mysterious doctor. We know these hollow people exist in our world, but what are they like behind the mirage? Why do they create the mirage? Thus, I feel like the dialogue carries the theme while driving the narrative forward.

The Evolutionist is a more classical horror tale; its development is slow, and the disintegration of reality doesn’t happen overnight. It’s a gradual process that allows readers to feel our protagonist’s struggles; while the rest of the people around her rather hollow, two-dimensional figures. If you’re looking for a novel that straddles the edge between literature and personal horror, this one is for you.

The graphic nightmare scenes were fun to read, mostly because they seemed like little needles that pricked at the protagonist’s subconscious. I am not a big fan of dream chapters in a novel; most dream chapters are pointless, expository, and pretentious. Rena Mason makes the dream sequences relevant because of their effect on the character, and the sudden shift in tone that grabs the reader out of the narrative. Mason didn’t have to use experimental prose; I mention this because this isn’t an examination of a novel that is surreal in nature, which would all for emphasis of the dream sequences, but Mason is able to maintain the story through these moments that bleed into reality.

As a newer author, I believe the sky is the limit for Mason. I look forward to reading more of her work.

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## **Carl Alves says**

In her debut novel, Rena Mason hits it out of the park with her horror novel *The Evolutionist*. Set in the Las Vegas suburbs, Stacy Troy lives a self-absorbed life with her friends, who are cast right out of one of those *Housewives* of show. Mason even cleverly has Stacy and her group of friends trying to be cast on the show. Her days are filled with yoga classes, spa treatments, and driving her son around. Her nights are filled with brutal nightmares where she dismembers the bodies of her loved ones. Although Stacy feels as if she is losing her mind, I wouldn’t classify this as a psychological horror novel. The nightmares lead to a purpose. When she can no longer take it, she goes to see Dr. Light, a psychiatrist, who uses strange techniques to help Stacy, except that her nightmares only get worse, and she begins to hear voices. The twist where this all leads to caught me by surprise in a good way.

The first thing that stands out is that Rena Mason is a talented writer, something that as a fellow writer I can appreciate. Her prose rings out strong and clear, especially her dialogue. The characters are also very well developed, even if they are not always likeable. For instance, Mason does a good job with Stacy's circle of friends, even though I didn't find any of them someone that I would root for. There is a nice build that leads to the climax, and a dark sense of foreboding that resonates in this book. If you like your fiction dark and appreciate good writing, this is a novel that you will want to pick up.

Carl Alves - author of Blood Street

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### **S.C. Hayden says**

I met Rena Mason at the 2012 World Horror Convention in Salt Lake City. She was friendly, enthusiastic, and an all around great gal. She'd also just had a story published in the charity anthology Horror For Good, which I purchased and read and loved and reviewed here and on schayden.com

Naturally, when her debut novel was released, I picked up a copy. Sure, I picked it up because she's an all around great gal but I also picked it up because "The Eyes Have It" her story in Horror For Good, was really quite excellent. As a general rule, if I like an author's short fiction, I'll also like their long fiction. Its not always true but it's pretty damn close and in Rena's case, the rule holds.

The Evolutionist is a tale about an upper middle class housewife, Stacy, on the verge of madness. Her nights are plagued by dreams of dismembered and burning bodies in a post-apocalyptic death-scape and her days are filled with blinding headaches, unexplainable nose bleeds, and hallucinations.

With the help of Dr. Light, a very odd and aptly named psychiatrist, we learn that our protagonist is actually much more than an upper middle class housewife. So much more, in fact, that she may hold the key to coming (or not) of the end of the world.

One of the book's strengths is the balance between the bizarre and the ordinary. Stacy's life is one of book clubs, lunch dates, and the duties of being a mom. But, underneath it all, there are waking dreams, terrifying nightmares, and a creeping loss of control. Unbeknownst to her husband and friends, she is quietly losing her mind.

My only criticism is that while the juxtaposing of strange and ordinary is superb, the ordinary is a bit too ordinary. I tend to be attracted to "flawed" characters. If Stacy had been anything beside a suburban housewife; a taxi driver with a drinking problem, a cop who is in love with a prostitute, a washed up boxer with a penchant for watercolors, it would have been more my speed, but that is a personal preference that probably says more about me than it does about the story or its author.

The bottom line is, The Evolutionist is a really good book. The pacing is great, the storyline is intriguing, and the ending is completely and wholly unexpected. It's a paranormal thriller, it's a horror mystery, it's dark sci-fi, it's chick lit with a twist, it's a whole lot of things, but most importantly, it's a damn good read.

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### **Bob says**

Excellent first novel. Difficult to put down. Interesting characters and very well written. Highly recommended.

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### **Ms. Nikki says**

I must present myself as together in the face of the vultures who watch and wait for me to stumble.  
Walk away, behind my back, do they mumble.

I am surrounded by people, faces, family, and friends.  
Yet I am alone with the voices whom real life contends.

I am told to open my eyes and realize who I am and who I'm not. I forget. I forgot.

I love my family or at least I think I do, but in my dreams I hurt them, I hurt too.

The voices whisper to me and what they say does appeal. When I touch my son all I feel is surreal.

Things are changing, rearranging, causing me to see a new sight. I must leave, live on, make new memories this night.

by Nikki~

This read was based on the ins and outs of Stacy's life and how and why the things in her life were changing. It took quite a while for me to get a grasp on what was happening. Once I did, I was able to settle back and enjoy the story this author wanted to express. I think I was expecting an apocalyptic tale with blood and guts, but I got more of a self-exploration read.

I read. I liked. It was different.

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### **bookgoddess88 says**

Get ready for lots of twists and turns with this read. I felt like I was on a roller coaster in the dark. There were many times I thought I knew what was going to happen and Rena Mason would take me in a completely different direction. Hard to believe this is her first novel. Way to go!

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### **Brian Matthews says**

Rena Mason's The Evolutionist is a marvelous read. From the beginning, you are drawn in to the world Stacy Troy, wife of a prominent Las Vegas doctor, who begins having horrible nightmares about killing her family and friends. Afraid that she is losing her mind, she starts seeing the mysterious Dr. Light, a psychiatrist with an odd approach to therapy. Stacy's nightmares worsen. Her world begins to fall apart. Then she is suddenly confronted with a reality she never expected, which propels her into a struggle to save herself and her family

from certain death.

Rena Mason has done a superb job with her first novel, especially given it is written in the first-person present tense, a notoriously tricky form that she handles with considerable skill. I will be looking forward to more work from her.

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### **Book Lovers Never Go to Bed Alone says**

Never judge a book by its cover as the old saying goes. It is never more true than for Rena Mason's debut novel *The Evolutionist*. A woman in a tight dress holding a bloody axe. Oh boy and oh dear. By the end of the first chapter, the cover was long forgotten and I was hooked.

Stacy Troy is just a woman living a normal, non-adventurous life in the suburbs of Las Vegas. She's not a remarkable, superhero kind of woman. When she begins having horrific nightmares, she approaches them as any average, normal person would. At first passing them off, she sees a doctor when they start affecting her waking hours from lack of sleep. Step two is of course the psychiatrist. Dr. Light is no normal psychiatrist however. Soon Stacy is plunged into a bizarre, macabre world where nothing is as it seems and nothing will ever be the same again.

Mason's use of the first person narrative works well here as we bob along in Stacy's confusion and irritation at the disruptions in her life. She's pissed that she can't sleep. We feel her increasing sense of panic and finally, the slide into oblivion as her world crumbles. The emotional rollercoaster is intense and Mason skillfully keeps us just on the edge of Stacy's fear. There's violence, but it's never overdone and serves to add to the morbidity of the situation quite well. Stacy's a character we understand and Mason definitely makes us feel that we too could wake up from a screaming nightmare to find our world shattered one fine day.

Far more supernatural than gore horror, *The Evolutionist* is a fascinating look into that delicate balance between the sleeping world of nightmares and the waking world of harsh reality. She forces us to examine the frightening possibility of that paper-thin wall crumbling down and the horrific consequences when these two separate planes slowly merge. Very disturbing indeed.

Originally published at Horror Novel Reviews

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### **11811 (Eleven) says**

This was deeply cynical and I enjoyed every bit of it. Unique horror/sci-fi combo. I saw a full page ad for the cover art in Cemetery Dance and bought it based on that alone. I'm glad I did.

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### **Noel Penaflor says**

A well-written novel, though I couldn't really remember being scared. For 2 hundred pages something ominous is intimated, but the payoff really isn't worth the laborious setup. There are passages and even pages of brilliance, but they only serve to highlight...when the novel is lacking. You get the feeling Mason's next

novel will be excellent, hoping the mistakes of a first novel will be addressed.

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## Bryan Alexander says

I continue my quest for great contemporary horror novels with *The Evolutionist*, by Rena Mason. And what a strange book it is.

The book begins by narrating the life of an upperclass Las Vegas housewife. She describes going to lunches, shopping, arranging parties, new clothes, meeting girlfriends, observations about her husband and son. It's a bit like *Sex and the City* crossed with *Desperate Housewives*, and made me check then recheck the book's description and gory cover to be sure I was reading the same book.

Then the narrator describes using an axe to cut up the broken corpses of her family and neighbors, while the end of the world scours skies above.

Ah.

I was reading the right book after all.

The first half of *The Evolutionist* is all about these switching narratives and genres. It turns out Stacy Troy is actually a housewife, but is having vivid nightmares, which seem to be sparking hallucinations. I admire Mason's remix ambition here, and enjoyed the combination for a while.

The second half, well, is spoiler time. (view spoiler)

So in her first novel Rena Mason ambitiously tackles a group of genres, shuttling her protagonist among them.

What to make of it... several thoughts.

As a horror novel, *The Evolutionist* has some scenes of note, but that's not what it's really about. Once again I'm disappointed in my quest.

As a novel, it's uneven. I was impressed at how much Mason seeks to cover. I liked the way some of the pieces played against each other. As the spouse and father of emergency services people, I appreciated her solid descriptions of medical situations. Some of the second half's scenes are well done (see spoilers above). I admire the choice of protagonist in these genres, becoming neither a horror movie's tough final girl nor a rebel shaking off her 1% housewife life.

But it's both too long and too thing. The novel repeats similar scenes and events with scant iteration. We don't need to see Troy's son being distracted that many times, or her husband worrying about her health, or the intrusive tones sounding off again and again. On the flipside, several important plotlines develop without sufficient preparation. For example, (view spoiler)

Moreover, I can only come up with so much sympathy and interest in the main character. Stacy Troy is a member of the socio-economic elite, and loves this position without much awareness or doubt. She's snobbish about products which seem low cost, never describes professional or domestic work (both

seemingly outsourced), never has any money issues, and yet complains about the difficulties of this life. Her only friends are the same way, just more obnoxious, verging on *Absolutely Fabulous* territory. They read awful-sounding books (*Memoirs of a Spa Junkie*), and are more interested in the decor of their reading salon than in actually talking about what they've supposedly read. This group of women actually try out for a reality tv show about elite housewives. There are hints of a more complex character in her parents, who seem to come from another world, but the story doesn't explore this. Stacy's final developments (spoilerized above) actually do little to alter her personality. In fact, her 1% status and sense of superiority simply increases.

I was struck by the narrative's gynocentrism, and wondered where that was going to end up. Most of her social contacts are women. Stacy's interests are perfectly in line with contemporary, stereotypical gender roles: shopping, clothes, motherhood, parties, conversations with female friends (often about men). The novel's ultimate plot points concern Stacy and motherhood. The few male characters get little time on the page, and usually turn out badly or anomalously: (view spoiler)

I'm not sure what this strategy entails, in the end. Is the gender focus entirely an effect of the protagonist's character? If so, what should we learn from it? Or is *The Evolutionist* offering a critique of modern life? If so, that doesn't seem to work with the book's second half. Or, more prosaically, did I just read a novel intended for a female audience? I'm not sure. Chick lit's not my thing, and I can't tell to what extent *Evolutionist* is supposed to fall into that category.

Or not. Perhaps the novel's conclusion and its characterization suggest another reading. Spoilerized accordingly: (view spoiler)

So *The Evolutionist* is an unusual horror novel. Readers who've made it to this point in my review will probably have a good idea by now if it's worth their reading. I'm intrigued by Rena Mason's first book, and will look for her next stories.

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