



The Well

Jack Cady

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John Tracker fled his family and their house years ago. But he has been lured back. He has entered the house with a woman he loves. And now they are trapped, struggling piteously against the unfathomable purpose of a power older than human fear. They have stepped into the hands of evil absolute

The Well Details

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From Reader Review The Well for online ebook

Christopher Fulbright says

John Tracker returns to his boyhood home after years of estrangement from his family, a family with a long and strange occult past. This is no average boyhood home -- it's a sprawling mansion in the snowswept rolling hills and forests, a cold river winding through the nearby valley. It's a house built by madmen and geniuses, added on to by generations of Trackers, and it's built on top of a well ... a well in which something sinister dwells. More than sinister -- something diabolically evil. And it has seeped into the home over the years, into the walls, the air ... and it knows John Tracker has returned.

This is the best horror novel I've read all year. It came out in 1981 or '82, I think. I bought a hardcover copy of it a few years ago and it sat on my shelf for a criminally long time before this fall. Now I'm kicking myself for having waited so long. This book is amazing. Frought with atmosphere, it's creepy, menacing, engrossing, and in places downright chilling. More than that, it's an awesome dive into the psyche not only of the main character, but the strange and broken history of an entire family -- all in about 250 pages. It's on par with the best work of Michael McDowell, Stephen King, or Peter Straub, without so many characters to make it seem overly long.

John Tracker is a flawed man. He's successful, but he's also someone who is acutely aware of his own shortcomings. He's actively coming to terms with himself and his past during the story, exploring grief and the reasons for his eventual leaving behind of his life in the twisted home of the Trackers that all the nearby locals fear and revere. The massive home through which he must journey once again to find out who, if any, of his family remains, is constructed with deadly traps and deceptions at every turn. It was built to thwart, contain, and ultimately control the evil presence in the well upon which it was built. This novel works on two levels -- it is a compelling journey of self discovery and a chilling horror novel that is neither pretentious, nor ever loses sight of its primary goals.

This is the first book I've read by Jack Cady, and it will by no means be my last. I was so impressed with this book that I immediately went online to see what else by him I could get my hands on. Stellar writing, amazing characterization, and a haunting story that resonates long after you finish it. Definitely recommended.

Rodney says

“You? ?ain’t? ?leaving? ?until? ?this? ?trouble”s? ?laid.? ?They’re? ?laying? ?all? ?around? ?you.”
The? ?setting? ?of? ?this? ?tale? ?is? ?the? ?Tracker? ?house.? ?It’s? ?seemingly? ?infinite? ?traps,? ?tricks? ?and? ?secret passages,? ?built? ?over? ?three? ?generations.? ?For? ?twenty? ?years? ?John? ?Tracker? ?has? ?stayed? ?away? ?from? ?the house? ?and? ?also? ?tried? ?to? ?forget? ?the? ?memories.? ?Now? ?he? ?must? ?reconcile? ?all? ?that? ?is? ?in? ?the? ?house before? ?it? ?is? ?destroyed? ?to? ?make? ?way? ?for? ?a? ?freeway? ?that? ?will? ?run? ?right? ?through? ?the? ?middle? ?of? ?the space? ?it? ?now? ?occupies.? ?He? ?doesn’t? ?even? ?know? ?if? ?his? ?father? ?and? ?grandparents? ?are? ?still? ?living? ?within the? ?place,? ?but? ?after? ?a? ?short? ?first? ?visit? ?he? ?realizes? ?quickly? ?that? ?the? ?is? ?going? ?to? ?take? ?a? ?hell? ?of? ?a? ?lot more? ?than? ?he? ?expected.
The? ?house? ?is? ?one? ?of? ?the? ?more? ?fascinating? ?locales? ?for? ?a? ?story? ?I? ?have? ?read.? ?While? ?I? ?reasonably enjoyed? the? ?book? ?as? ?a? ?whole,? ?it? ?was? ?hindered? ?at? ?times? ?by?

?the? ?meandering? ?and? ?overly? ?descriptive prose? ?and? ?would? ?have? ?been? ?stronger? ?with? ?some? ?of? ?the? ?excess? ?trimmed,? ?but? ?then? ?again? ?this? ?is early? ?80's? ?horror.? ?The? ?characters? ?weren't? ?ones? ?to? ?elicit? ?much? ?of? ?an? ?emotional? ?response? ?from? ?me either.? ?All in all I am undecided,? ?but? ?left? ?curious? ?enough? ?to? ?check? ?out? ?another? ?book? ?or? ?two? ?from? ?Jack? ?Cady.

James Adams says

The past isn't over. Sometimes, it isn't even past.

Someone important must have said that to Cady at some point, because it is a recurring theme in his work, never more so than here. Boiled down, a man has to go back to his ancestral home, intending to destroy it. Said home is filled with traps, memories, and something... worse.

That synopsis makes it sound like a cheesy thrill-ride, but that isn't what you get. This is a slow-burning, meditative work that dwells on memory, guilt, good and evil, and the bonds of blood that tie us to the rest. No shocking gore or cheap titillation here, just very strange people going mad in a house they created and then corrupted.

Cady's prose is always tight, and the characters are superb. Sadly, there isn't much happening here. It's a little dull, and even its fascinations are as academic as anything. It's good, but not for everyone. Those with patience may be rewarded.

Kimberly says

"There are Things that do not love the sun. They weep and curse their own creation."

THE WELL, by Jack Cady, is based on the Tracker family and a house built over time to "trap" the devil....at least, theoretically. I loved the traps set into the house, the hidden stairways, rooms, and dangers inherent everywhere. The story itself was good, but the "family background" at the beginning of each chapter got a little confusing at times (especially when it would refer to the "great-great-great grandmother on his grandfather's side"). There were parts of the story that I couldn't stop reading, and others that just confused me further, and didn't seem to have any bearing on the main theme.

Due to the "unevenness" of the narrative, I'm giving a three-star rating. Good story, but some lost in the clutter of excess information.

Char says

"There are Things that do not love the sun. They weep and curse their own creation. Sometimes on earth a cruel shift takes place. Time splits. Corpses possessed at the moment of their death rise from tombs. The dark ages of history flow mindless from stagnant wells and lime-dripping cellars. The corpses, those creatures of possession, walk through ancient halls and rooms." So starts Jack Cady's The Well.

Extremely well written, this is an excellent haunted house story, but it's also much more than that. It's a tale spanning generations, sprinkled throughout with genius and madness alike.

"He thought he knew the look of greed, lust, envy; but he realized without question that he was now looking at the force that embodied them all. He was looking at absolute evil."

This edition from Valancourt Books features a touching Introduction from Tom Piccirilli, (who has since passed away.) In it, Tom speaks of the kindness Jack Cady showed him when he first started out, which is coincidental-because I recently read a piece by another author who said the very same things about Tom Piccirilli. Tom goes on further to talk about The Well and how it influenced him and his writing, and now having read the book, I can see why. I'm glad that I bought my very own copy, because I'm sure I'll be reading it again in the future.

Note to self: Check out more works written by Jack Cady, ASAP.

Brucifer says

I really wanted to like this novel after having heard good things about it, but it was a disappointment. The setting is the protagonist, John Tracker's, family mansion, which he left at age 15, and which his great grandfather and grandfather had equipped with booby traps in nearly every room, in the hope of "capturing the devil." Now that the house is about to be torn down to make room for a highway, John has come back to what he assumes to be an empty house to face his childhood demons. This is an interesting premise, but unfortunately it isn't fulfilled in a satisfactory way. I was immediately put off by Cady's writing style, which constantly calls attention to itself and which only gets more ostentatious as the novel wears on. The booby-trapped and maze-like house is an interesting idea, but by trying to throw readers off balance, the author also never gives us a very clear picture of what the house actually looks like. Instead, we find ourselves moving with John and his girlfriend Amy from room to room, up and down stairwells, experiencing time lapses, and glimpsing one vaguely drawn supernatural vision after another. By the halfway point, all of this gets tedious and is never genuinely frightening. I'll give the author credit for some good ideas, such as trying to tell a haunted house story in a different way, and opening each chapter with a biography of a new member of the bizarre Tracker family tree. But the whole thing just never falls into place, sadly.

Matt says

This book is one I could reread several times. It's fun, scary, and inventive. My rating may go up with some more thought and time.

Jared says

As one moves deeper into the house, one moves deeper into oneself. Not a shabby concept, and the psychological puzzles and traps John and Amy must evade in this clever novel are quite ingenious at times. Nevertheless, this enticing book never really comes to a head. Great journey, okay destination.

Sarada says

This book held a lot of promise, as its focus is a vast, diabolical house full of traps and tricks, created by a madman and designed to capture the devil. One can feel that the author intended to take a fresh new approach to the haunted house story, adapting it to a contemporary (1981) setting with a narrative style that borders on stream-of-consciousness.

The author's writing style undermines this excellent premise, however, as I think that Cady was trying to introduce some experimental elements to the genre, but the storytelling mode does not fit the subject matter. Although told in the third person, the narrative mostly consists of the internal monologue of the main character, John Tracker. The main problem with this is that Tracker doesn't have very much on his mind that is worth recording in moment-to-moment detail.

The characters in this book (there are really only two, Tracker and his girlfriend, Amy; the house itself and the phantom presences therein could be said to comprise the third main character in the book) are very flat and uninteresting. Tracker is a 40-year-old successful businessman and he reminds us almost constantly throughout the book that he is a 40-year-old successful businessman, who has immersed himself in his work to escape the memories of his childhood in this house. Meanwhile, the character of Amy so frustrated me that I almost gave up on the book multiple times. She is a 30-year-old secretary, and the book's author seems to have derived all of his notions of the internal world of a 30-year-old woman from the covers of magazines sold at grocery store check-outs. She is obsessed with the fact that she is 30, and "too old" to be an actress; otherwise she is pining over an old boyfriend, thinking about her current one, and thinking about her own attractiveness and desirability. She seems to define herself entirely in relation to the men in her life (of which, she reminds us several times, there have been very few). The blossoming love between these two characters is lifeless and appears to be grounded entirely on the fact that they are of the opposite sex, and worked together for a long time. She seemingly becomes hysterical and unhinged at many key moments in the book, and Tracker repeatedly expresses his own exasperation with having her along.

One never gets a clear idea of what the house itself looks like, as Cady only describes it in small, detailed areas, as though one is trying to describe a room based on magnifying-glass sized observations. Instead, the main character's incessant internal monologue continues, pondering the same two or three points throughout the entire novel.

I love labyrinthine passages, strange, surreal environments and magical realism, all of which it seems like this book could deliver. The touches of magical realism – for instance, the assertion that the house causes disruption in the flow of time – is handled awkwardly and creates no real sense in the reader that anything remarkable has happened. Even descriptions of the characters artificially aging at one point, are rather vague, so that I couldn't be sure what had happened.

The overall premise, though, is strong, and I don't regret having read it. The description of the well at the center of the house, from which all of the evil emanates, was very compelling, and the idea of a sinister "subcellar" was haunting and satisfying. There are some moments of genuine suspense and horror toward the end of the book. Perhaps if I had not been turned off early on, by the focus on these rather uninteresting characters, I could have immersed myself more fully in the atmosphere of the house. I would still recommend it to fans of house-based horror, and I do appreciate the author's attempts to energize the genre with a new approach. Ultimately I would have liked to have read something that took the extra step toward being completely experimental, surreal or steeped in magical realism, instead of constantly pulling us back from that threshold.

Jack Tripper says

Full review (1/29/17)

I first read this 1981 novel as a teen in the mid-90s, during the latter stages of my initial six or seven year-long love affair with horror fiction (the end of which happened to coincide with the total collapse of the horror market, which had still been hanging on by a thread before that point*), and while I remembered enjoying it, I could recall next to nothing about it other than the fact that I really dug the setting: a gigantic, possibly haunted labyrinthine mansion filled with ultra-deadly booby traps everywhere. Which meant: time for a re-read.

John Tracker grew up in this insane house with his insane family, as generations of Trackers before him had. He's tried to forget his strange childhood there in that secluded place in Indiana, and in the decades since has cut off all contact with his relations and vowed never to return, but is forced to, as the house -- which is more like a castle really -- has been condemned to make way for a new highway. He's pretty sure his remaining family have since passed away, as there have been no records of electricity use or phone bills there for years, and there's no way they'd ever move. Still, John, along with (against his better judgement) his new girlfriend, heads back to Indiana. And to the house.

It's even more sprawling and maze-like than he remembered, laden with increasingly lethal traps and tricks at every turn, which previous generations of loony Trackers had built in order to capture or stave off demons and/or the devil himself. The couple are soon forced to hole up there when a severe snowstorm bombs the area. The mansion *seems* unoccupied, but something feels off, and they definitely sense some sort of...*presence*, one that's stalking them. Too bad they're stuck there, with no chance of escape.

This is an above-average example of horror from the era, with far above-average prose. Jack Cady, who also penned literary-type fiction, certainly knows how to write. Unfortunately, he's not as proficient at creating suspense, or even (at least here) characters to root for and sympathize with. Rarely did I feel scared for the safety of the main characters, because I didn't really care about them. The house itself is the main attraction, and (one could say) the main character. The endless halls, mazes, and "tricks" were what intrigued me, and what carried me through.

Overall, I wouldn't call *The Well* an absolute must-read for fans of 70s and 80s horror fiction, but it is well-worth checking out for connoisseurs that want to dig a little more deeply into the era.

Oh and in case anyone was worried, I did eventually find my way back to the genre after our little falling-out, and have kept my promise to remain loving and loyal ever since.

3.5 Stars.

*Thanks to the efforts of publishers like Dell, whose Abyss imprint was still putting out quasi-monthly mass-markets by up-and-coming writers -- Poppy Z. Brite, Brian Hodge, Melanie Tem, Kathe Koja, etc. -- who at least made the attempt to try something different and new, as opposed to just rehashing the same tired plots like some of the main culprits of the crash (who shall remain nameless)...for example Zebra Books (okay so I lied), who so oversaturated the genre with garbage that it made it next to impossible for readers to

wade through and find the good stuff (though Zebra did put out the *occasional* hidden gem).

Thomas Strömquist says

I enjoyed the old-school and nicely flowing narrative and language of this book - and I absolutely adored the description of the old family house, that was built upon and expanded for many years. Not to mention "improved" with secrets, traps and mazes - I've always been fascinated with attics, basements, crawlspaces and hidden passages, fake bookshelves, fake panels, double walls - heck, a secret compartment in a drawer goes a long way for me. Unfortunately there's not a whole lot else.

The story is that John Tracker returns to this house, his family home after some years of leaving and having no contact with his family. Against his better judgment, he brings his colleague-cum-girlfriend and they spend 200 pages of stumbling around the house, avoiding the traps, but unable to avoid the time shifts(!) that occur therein. Thanks to the good writing this is enough to be a decent book, but the length of it is stretching it, really.

The book has a family tree drawn and stories about the ancestors preface every chapter - sometimes a page or two, sometimes just a paragraph. Surprisingly, these often contain the best stories in my opinion, such as this one:

Hildegard Schuder was Johan's mother. She was John Tracker's great great grandmother on his father's father's side. She left Berne at age seventeen for Darmstadt in unusual haste, the pressing reason being that Hildegard was ugly. She married Christian Traker, because there was no one else to marry. The casual vacation that Christian had taken returned him to Germany with a wife he never tried to understand.

A brilliant story told in five sentences!

Others are quite humorous - a welcome contrast to the sometimes dry main story and the stiff and not very likeable John Tracker:

To say that Miller was vain would be to misunderstand the word. Miller was vain when he was asleep. When awake, the vanity took a sort of Spanish Flamenco presence. Over the years an unusual number of blond-haired and blue-eyed children were born to his congregation.

To say that Miller was lazy would be like describing a dead turtle as indolent. [...]

Definitely read-worthy, not likely something that I'll ever read again.

Nancy Oakes says

The Well is a book that is so rich in atmosphere that a serious case of the creepies grabbed me from the very beginning. This may just be one of the most original haunted house novels I've ever encountered, and the story, like the house itself, takes several eerie twists and turns along the way as we weave our way through its darkness. Quite honestly, I'd never heard of Jack Cady before reading this book, but to my mind, he nails the whole haunted house concept here with the emphasis on haunted.

I realized this one was going to be something completely different even before I'd finished reading the first few lines:

"There are Things that do not love the sun. They weep and curse their own creation. Sometimes on earth a cruel shift takes place. Time splits. Corpses possessed at the moment of their death rise from tombs. The dark ages of history flow mindless from stagnant wells and lime-dripping cellars. The corpses, those creatures of possession, walk through ancient halls and rooms... Through endless halls are dusks gathering like the memory of screams. There is a concatenation. Presences drift toward combination. Darkness rises and takes shape behind the sound of footsteps."

When a book begins like this one does, you start to think that that this just might possibly turn out to be a fun, chill-producing ride, and that it did.

plot without spoilers (I swear!) can be found here for those who want to whet their appetites (scroll down a bit since there are two books being discussed there).

While there are spots in this book where the writing just grated, overall, it's one of the creepiest, darkest, haunted house stories I've ever read, certainly high on the list of most original. Sheesh! I read this one twice and even in the middle of the second read I was still freaked out enough that I had to put the book down and go do something else. It's not only the horrors that stand out though, since it is also a story about the people who'd lived in the house from its beginnings, so there's also plenty of insight into human nature. I won't say more, but seriously, there's a reason that this house is described as a "well of depravity."

This one I wholeheartedly recommend.

Hester says

John Tracker is returning to his childhood home, house of the Trackers. John Tracker brought his secretary/kind of girlfriend Amy with him. John Tracker has to get house of the Trackers ready for demolition so a highway can be built on the property. John Tracker takes Amy with him to house of the Trackers. There's evil living in house of the Trackers. The evil in house of the Trackers makes Amy and John Tracker old before their time. Amy doesn't want to be old and this displeases her so John Tracker has to fight the evil to reverse the aging curse that house of the Trackers has put on Amy.

Okay, I can either keep going on like this or you can get the hint that Cady uses John Tracker and house of the Trackers so much it becomes mind numbing. And my mind went numb, so numb I honestly couldn't grasp most of what I read. John Tracker's great great grandfather (there could be another great in there but I'm not sure) was so afraid of the devil that he built a monstrous house with a bunch of traps in it so he could trap that rascally wabbit, Old Nick himself. After generations of paranoia his grandfather and grandmother invite that evil in and it takes over the house and his grandparents too.

John Tracker has to fight the evil in house of the Trackers in the most boring nothing happens at all battle ever! (view spoiler)

This book is all kinds of dull, nothing happens. Amy and John Tracker walk through the house, they have to find non poisoned cans of food to cook they walk through the house some more, rapidly age and then rapidly de-age, John Tracker finds his father's journals, Cady bores us with Tracker family history and finally they

walk through the house some more.

The Well is like one long bad episode of house hunters.

Bill says

I listened to this one on audio and Matt Godfrey nailed it. It's difficult to say, but I think this was a solid 3 star work with 5 star narration that really elevated the story to a new level for me. I have listened to several Godfrey audiobooks and dude nails them every time. He has a great sense of pacing and his cadence and tone are always spot on.

The story itself had a great premise that took a bit of a slow burn to get into. I was confused a time or two trying to get the backstory straight in my head, but honestly it didn't detract too much from the overall story of the Tracker house. Reminded me a bit of 13 Ghosts meets The Winchester Mystery House.

Overall, a very enjoyable tale. My first Cady too. Not my last however.

I was given a free review copy of this audiobook at my request and have voluntarily left this honest review.

Lee Thompson says

Jack Cady was an amazing writer. My favorite is still STREET, but this one is damn good too though it takes some patience because the pacing is very slow.
