



# The Overnight

*Ramsey Campbell*

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## **The Overnight** Ramsey Campbell

A bookstore can be a wonderful, welcoming place of both commerce and curiosity. That's the goal for Woody, an American recently transferred to England to run a branch of Texts. He wants a clean, orderly store and lots of sales to show his bosses when they arrive from the States for a pre-Christmas inspection. Not easy given the shop's location in a foggy strip mall.

And things keep going wrong. No matter how often the shelves are put in order before the doors are locked at night, when the staff returns in the morning, books are lying all over the floor, many damp and damaged beyond repair. The store's computers keep acting up-errors appear in brochures and ads and orders disappear completely. And even when the machines are turned off, they seem to glow with a spectral gray light.

The hit-and-run death of an employee in the store's parking lot marks a turning point. One employee accuses another of making sexual advances and they come to blows. Between one sentence and the next, one loses his ability to read. The security monitors display half-seen things crawling between the stacks that vanish before anyone can find them.

Desperate, Woody musters his staff for an overnight inventory. When the last customers reluctantly depart, leaving almost-visible trails of slime shining behind them, the doors are locked, sealing Woody and the others inside for a final orgy of shelving.

The damp, grey, silent things that have been lurking in the basement and hiding in the fog may move slowly, but they are inexorable. This bookstore is no haven. It is the doorway to a hell unlike any other.

## **The Overnight Details**

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Author : Ramsey Campbell

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# From Reader Review *The Overnight* for online ebook

## Karl says

This hard cover edition is copy 28 of 500 and is signed by Ramsey Campbell. Note a slipcased edition was also produced.

Campbell reveals in his acknowledgments that he found himself short of funds in March 2001 and went to work at a British branch of Borders. In the story the book store staff is assembled together for an overnight stock take and the things outside move inside. The characters are under attack and they don't even realize it. Not until too late for most of them anyway.

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## Jerry Balzano says

Gotta say, that Ramsey Campbell writes some pretty disturbing sh\*t .... Not in the Stephen-King-piledriver sense *at all* (see *Under the Dome*)... almost the opposite – Campbell crawls inside your head, gets nice and comfy, and then opens up his little box of dark slimy things after it's too late for you to *uninvite* him. As of this writing, I am about 75% of the way through both this book, and *Silent Children*, and I have, shall we say, *paused* for a while, because both tales have gotten to the point where they have become more or less relentlessly disturbing, in a way that King or D. Koontz hardly ever is. King, for example, always breaks up his horror with humor. But there is nothing funny going on in the last 30% of *The Overnight*, and it requires a certain grim dedication to, even relish for, the sheer horror of the situation, to keep on reading in earnest. I do intend to do this! But I want to do it when I'm in the proper frame of mind, so that I can properly appreciate the horrific sequence of events for which Campbell has so carefully, even lovingly, prepared us.

A word of mild warning: Some readers will find said "preparation" to be intolerably "slow" or "boring" or "pointless". I say this without having read any other reviews of the book because, as I say, I haven't finished reading it yet, and I don't wish to be confronted with anything even remotely resembling a "spoiler"! But let me say, the comments of anyone who makes this sort of remark really should be taken with a serious chunk of salt; I do believe it says more about their troublesome attention spans than it does about the book they're reading, and more about their unwillingness to invest more than a minimal amount of energy in a book in return for its "payoff". Most readers who are in that category probably haven't even gotten that far in this review, I imagine. But if you are, and if you have, please forgive me for intentionally making fun of you, but also consider the possibility that *The Overnight*, and Ramsey Campbell in general, may not be "your cup of tea". Not entirely sure it's mine, either ... but we'll see.

UPDATE: Finished the book, and my rating stands, although the ending did pack more of a punch than I expected ... another example of Campbell's insidious writerly ways of shocking the reader but saving the most unsettling shocks -- appropriately enough -- for the end.

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## Catherine Cavendish says

I love bookshops. I love the feel of being surrounded by books. They transport you into worlds you would otherwise never visit. Ramsey Campbell worked, for a couple of years, in a branch of Borders, in Cheshire

and his inside knowledge of the mundane routines of shelf-stacking and stock rotation are put to good use here. Especially when things start to happen during the performance of those daily tasks.

It starts with a fog, seemingly innocuous enough at first - well, the store is on a retail park called Fenny Meadows - marshland all around providing a magnet for low lying, swirling mists. But this fog persists, it gets worse. It invades, insinuates itself and provides a highly effective cloak for whatever is lurking in its shadowy depths. The author builds the plot and characters deliciously. A mysterious death, staff behaving oddly - or are they? Wonderful tension between the characters that we can all relate to in a working environment. The action moves forward. By now there can be no doubt in the reader's mind that something is about to go horribly wrong for the staff of Texts. Then comes the overnight shift... Wonderful reading. Highly recommended.

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## **Noah Soudrette says**

Campbell manages to superbly capture the unique social hierarchy and experience of working in a book store. He offers a fun yet sharp edged take of everything from corporate policy, to weird customers, to inter-employee politics, and so on.

There is no term which can better describe this book than “slow burn.” The novel is divided into chapters, each chapter titled with a character’s name rather than a chapter number. This gives us a chance to get to know the myriad cast of characters by dividing out clearly, little chunks of the book dedicated to each. Almost right from the start, we see a gradual change in each character’s personality. The effect the store has on each character is to simply make them more and more irritable towards each other. In fact, seventy-five percent of the book is comprised of the characters not getting along with each other. While this creates the “slow burn” that pushes us towards the book's final act, it also renders most all of the characters very unpleasant. It’s not that the characters aren’t fully developed; they are. You simply have to be prepared for about three hundred pages of bickering. Of course Campbell, being the great writer he is, uses these petty conflicts to bring out small background and personality details in each character. So, I must warn you, that if you’re the type of reader who demands likable characters, you might have a problem with this book.

The problems I had with this book were ones of a contradictory nature. While I like the amount of the novel dedicated to character development, I found that what we did learn about each person only really scratched the surface and resulted in somewhat easy to describe characters: the gay one, the corporate stooge, the single mother, the drug user, etc. Also, I felt a bit let down by the amount of closure at the end of the book. A handful of the character’s fates are not explored. While I often like that kind of ambiguity and being given the responsibility of having to make your own mind up about a few things, I just felt that after this “slow burn” towards a climax, the climax just wasn’t very climactic. Especially after having some trouble with the incredible amount of nastiness between characters, I felt I really needed that payoff.

Now, I do not wish to imply that the supernatural shit never hits the fan, because it does, and these parts are easily the best bits of the book and what Ramsey Campbell does best. The threat remains unclear throughout the entirety of the novel, right down to how it manifests itself. We are never given a very clear description of anything. All of the threats are half glimpsed or dismissed as nerves or imagination lending a wonderfully creepy “there’s something just around the corner” feel to the whole affair. While the scary bits are highly satisfying on a visceral level, Campbell’s use of the slowly encroaching fog and the idea of the store and its

employees being “swallowed up” by the earth itself as a metaphor for the place of books and book lovers in our modern world is simply brilliant. This book is definitely not going to be an easy read for everyone, and those who like their horror purely blood and guts should look elsewhere. However, that said, if your looking for something different and creepy I recommend this book, especially if you’ve ever worked retail.

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## **Seizure Romero says**

I've taken dumps that were more frightening than this book.

I've worked in bookstores: new, used, independent and big-ass chain stores. You want scary? Write about the incompetence rife in Barnes & McNoble's management. I've been out of there for more than a decade & I still twitch sometimes late at night (and occasionally over daiquiris in the afternoon). The horror...

Hold me.

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## **Keri says**

I expected to adore this book, because I love bookstores and I love horror, so what could be better than combining them? As it turns out, what could be better is combining them and then actually writing a climax and ending that had anything at all to do with the previous foreshadowing and buildup.

To me, it seemed as if Campbell spent about two-thirds of the book preparing to tell a story, and then got bored and decided to just have some monsters eat everyone instead of actually telling that story. The hints at backstory we're given about the bookstore's violent past and the seething tensions set up among the cast of Texts employees strongly suggested (at least to me) that something truly horrifying, not just on a supernatural level but on a human level, was going to happen once the doors were locked for that fateful overnight inventory.

Instead... well, some monsters ate everyone. And a certain character who had become steadily more detestable, repulsive and even frightening over the course of the novel is suddenly snapped back into the role of protagonist at the end-- I suppose it can be explained away by the novel's constant switching of POVs, but it was still jarring, especially since I was fully expecting that character to go in the exact opposite direction and become the true "villain" of the piece.

Admittedly, the creepy atmosphere is built effectively, and some of the satirical character moments are well-done... and the ambiguous ending of Jill's final POV chapter is incredibly disturbing in a subtle way, and one of the more effective horror moments I've read recently. Too bad it couldn't have found a place in an overall better book.

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## **Quirkyreader says**

This book was super trippy. Also, it had plenty of Machen overtones.

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## James says

This is one of those novels I've wanted to read for many years now, partly because I'm a fan of Campbell's work in general, and partly because, as someone who has worked as a bookseller since 2004 (which, coincidentally, is the year this novel was published), the subject matter (a haunted bookstore) seemed of interest to me. And yet for whatever reason I just kept putting it off... it probably doesn't help that it seemed to get a lot of very negative reviews. But I finally got to it recently and I really enjoyed it, and while not without its flaws (at over 400 pages, it does seem a little lengthy for a Campbell novel, most of which usually fall somewhere in the 300-350 page range), overall I found it a genuinely enjoyable reading experience. One thing that differentiates this book from others of his that I've read is that it has a very large main cast, and he made the decision to make each chapter the point of view of a specific character (I recall he did something similar in his novel *Obsession*, though with a far smaller cast): but because there are 13 POV characters and only 27 chapters, most characters only get 2 chapters at most from their perspective. With its numerous mentions to mud and fog, the decayed atmosphere generated by the book is quite oppressive and suffocating, and despite all the negative reviews that complain about how boring the book is I found some scenes in the second half to be quite creepy... the ending of one chapter towards the very end of the book in particular concludes on a note of chilling ambiguity. But I think the main reason why I like this book was I found it interesting comparing my experiences as an American Barnes & Noble employee to that of a British Borders employee (though it must be said Campbell only worked at Borders for around half a year, whereas I'm still truckin'), and noting the similarities and differences. In some ways this book made me very nostalgic, because the store operations and procedures described herein reminded me of my first few years on the job, before the advent of accursed e-reader devices. I guess what I'm trying to say here is that I think this book's ideal audience are readers who have worked at a major mainstream bookstore chain...

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## Robert says

This slow-burn British flesh-crawler is populated by a mostly unlikable group of rather dreary worker bees who succumb one by one to the nasty supernatural evil that rules over the Borders-like corporate-owned bookstore that employs them. A lot of people here really seemed to hate this book and I can understand the feeling – the characters are hard to root for and the length of the novel is perhaps excessive (I could've lopped off a good 75 pages at least, with no discernable detriment to the overall story). The subtle satire of the soulless corporation almost literally consuming its drones is clever, and there are more than a few major creep-outs: one character gets trapped in a cramped lift with all the lights extinguished, with something awful eventually paying her a visit and my claustrophobia went into hyperdrive. Plus it all wraps up satisfyingly, with a few surprises here and there. Ramsey Campbell is considered one of our finest contemporary horror writers, and I wholeheartedly agree with that assessment, but I think he's strongest in the short story format; perhaps *The Overnight* might have worked best as a longish short story or even a novella. The characters here are, as usual in a Campbell narrative, drab, ordinary, smaller-than-life specimens - not the most thrilling company to keep for 390 pages, though the human villain, the bossman named Woody, is definitely colorful in a thoroughly obnoxious way. In the end I would recommend this mostly to devoted fans and advise the casual horror reader to look elsewhere.

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## Kevin Lucia says

Another classic Ramsey Campbell, who brings to like stark terror in the mundane fears, conflicts, and weaknesses humans have. His work derives its punch from a surreal sense of displacement, confusion, and the way we flail our way through life.

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## Murray Ewing says

US bookshop chain Texts opens its newest branch in Fenny Meadows, an as-yet unfinished retail park that soon proves to have a bit of a problem with fog — not to mention being the site of several ancient massacres. (Don't they look into this sort of thing at the planning application stage?) When staff at the store seem to be losing the battle against poor sales, typos in promotional materials, constantly messed-up shelves, damaged books and a growing antipathy between themselves, manager Woody — a truly frightening caricature of corporate flag-waving and employee motivation — suggests they all work through the night to get ready for an executive visit. By this time, there's already been one death among the staff, but things are about to get a lot worse.

Although by no means a bad novel, I wouldn't say this is one of Campbell's best. The supernatural horror element, though nicely subtle in its gradual build-up, is too unfocused to really mount up to a single horror. If it had just been the effect Fenny Meadows, with its dark and violent past, had on the staff (particularly the over-focused Woody), that would have made for an excellent story; but we also get a mix of gloopy, sloppy, muddy things emerging to add a bit of horror — why are they needed, if the supernatural force beneath the shop can get the humans to do the worst for themselves? They seem like horror elements brought in just for horrific effect (and rather standard horrific effect, as gloopy, sloppy, muddy things are Campbell's go-to entity for horror) rather than to build up to some single, larger revelation. It's a pity, as the title, **The Overnight**, sounds like a wonderful pun mixing the drudgery of work with Lovecraftian horror, but there's not enough sense of the latter for this to be the case.

**The Overnight** is also something of a transitional work for Campbell, as it's halfway towards the sort of dark, dry horror-comedy of his next novel, **The Grin of the Dark** (which is one of his best). **The Overnight** can be read as straight horror, but it works better if you see it as a slightly over-played and very dark absurdist horror-comedy about work. Woody is surely the best (though somewhat underused) part of the novel, in this regard — an over-zealous and inhuman corporate manic entirely focused on forcing his employees to smile at every moment. 'There's too much thinking getting in our way round here,' being my favourite Woody quote.

Overall, I'd say **The Overnight** is for the Campbell fan (of which I'm one) than a reader new to his work. If you *are* new to Campbell, head for **The Grin of the Dark**. You know it's waiting for you.

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## Bandit says

I always wanted to work in a bookstore. Ramsey Campbell did and it inspired him to write a book that will make you want to never ever even consider thinking that shelving books for a living could be fun. The book itself is pretty slow and reserved for a horror genre, scarier than the creatures is the mundane work place rut and the soul sucking passive aggressive co-workers. That, I think, Campbell captures very accurately. I don't

yet know what to make of him as a horror writer, but I think I like him as a writer and I'd read more books by him.

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## **Greg says**

I would have given this two and a half stars if I had the option. Instead it gets two. The writing feels awkward at times, and the pace of the book is on the slow side. By the time the horror begins I was thinking oh good now it will get exciting, except that it became obvious very quickly that the bad things would happen in a formulaic manner. I'd say more but it might ruin the experience for others, and I like knowing that my own painful experiences may one day be experienced by others in a similar manner as I experienced them. Although the moment when I realized that the plot was sort of ripped off from a late 1980's sequel made the already persistent feeling that I was only wasting my time reading this swell to new heights of disappointment. On second thought now this book does deserve 2 stars.

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## **James Everington says**

Ramsey Campbell is an author seemingly as prolific as he is influential – I'm a big fan, but I've still got a number of his books to read. Fortunately my wife got me four of his books newly reissued as paperbacks from PS Publishing for Christmas. The first I've read is *The Overnight*.

(Before we start, I'll say that these paperbacks from PS Publishing are very good quality-wise – not something I often notice with paperbacks, but these are nice books to read, seemingly on better paper than most paperbacks and with good covers and designs. But anyway.)

This edition has an interesting and enthusiastic introduction from Mark Morris – obviously a keen fan of Campbell, and as he admits possibly an indirect catalyst of the book itself, because it was Morris who first got Campbell a job in a bookshop... and *The Overnight* is set in Texts, a bookshop in a foggy retail park known as Fenny Meadows. (Incidentally, the fact that an author as talented as Campbell had to get a job to support his writing is profoundly depressing, isn't it? We should be putting up statues of the man, not have him stacking bookshelves.)

I suspect some horror fans won't get on with *The Overnight*. The story is told from multiple points of view, and there is a loooooong build up before things get truly nasty (but believe me, they do). Some of the devices used to generate tension in the earlier sections of the novel might seem hackneyed in lesser hands – unseasonal fog, mysterious noises, strange substances like slug-trails ignored. In his short stories, Campbell is the master of describing partially seen horrors that the characters rationalise away (and sometimes that refusal to see is as scary as the thing itself). Here, over the length of a full novel, it can sometimes seem annoying that all of the characters constantly display the same trait: not one of them thinking the thing that looks like an evil-fog-monster-thingy might actually be an evil-fog-monster-thingy.

But this adds a strength to the narrative as well - each character only sees part of the picture; it's only the reader who sees the connections, only the reader who realises just how bad things are getting out there in the fog... Of course if they were talking to each other, the employees of Texts might realise too, but the book's characters often seem like they are talking a different language to each other (and not just between the American manager Woody and the rest of them). One of the themes of *The Overnight* is miscommunication:



arguments & misunderstandings between the characters; electronic voices failing in the lift and on the speakers; videos becoming corrupted and books unreadable... and the taunting, mimicing voices of the unseen things themselves.

The final third of the book is a compelling set-piece, as Woody gathers all of his staff together for an overnight stock-take and the things outside move in - the characters are under attack and they don't even realise. Well, not until too late for most of them anyway - it's hardly a spoiler to say that not all the characters make it out of Texts alive. But, as befitting a novel about how miscommunication can leave us isolated, most (but importantly not all) of those who do die do so alone, unable even to warn the others...

It's a bleak message, but an exhilarating book. Highly, highly recommended.

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## **Danger Kallisti says**

This really struck me as one of those books that famous people write because they know someone will buy it, and not because they have anything worthwhile to say. I mean, come on, a haunted Borders? By the end I was just counting the pages until it was done.

While he hinted at some dark and gruesome history to the place, he never actually made clear what that history was, and it felt he just killed everyone off so that he could call it good and say he'd finished the book.

For the king of atmospheric horror, this was about the dullest thing I think he could make. It didn't even have the frenzied claustrophobia of *The Hungry Moon* to redeem it.

Granted, I did like that the single mother and the druggie survived, but that's only due to the principle of the thing, and not because I was ever given a particularly good reason to like them. Also, it did have the trademark Campbell twist, where the reader can't decide if the spooky things are spookier, or the mundane stupidity of the outside world, and I like that.

Overall, I'd rather have a quick and mildly amusing read like this than another book like *Instance of the Fingerpost* weighing on me, but that doesn't mean I'd go out of my way to find it.

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