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Since George Lister's chemical plant closed down, Innertown has been a shadow of its former self. In the woods that once teemed with life, strange sickly plants grow. Homes that were once happy are threatened by a mysterious illness.

Here, a young boy named Leonard and his friends exist in a state of confusion and despair, as every year or so a boy from their school vanishes after venturing into the poisoned woods. Without conclusive evidence of foul play, the authorities consider the boys to be runaways.

The town policeman suspects otherwise but, paralyzed with fear, he does nothing. And so it is up to the children who remain to take action. Their plan to stop the forces of evil that are destroying their town is at the shocking and terrifying heart of *The Glister*.

The Glister Details

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Author : John Burnside

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From Reader Review The Glister for online ebook

Tracy says

This is one of those books that I want to rank on two completely different scales - one for atmosphere and one for story.

On the former, The Glister gets a fantastic score, 4 or even 5. A sort of literary horror, the whole work is laid over with a subtle, sinister edge. The nearly feral teenagers, the remains of the chemical plant poisoning not only the land but the people, physically and psychologically was done with sinister and often subtle edge and a dreamlike quality.

The initial set-up was also brilliant. The shifting narration is well done and I was hit with immediate empathy toward Morrison, Laurence and the desperate sadness of Andrew's life (and how all three seem to be a twisted reflection of each other.) I wanted to know what was happening in the town, the motivations of the murders and of the cover-up. If anybody would escape the town and the dying fathers.

And then it never came through - the story never really went anywhere. Entire lines seemed to drop from the author's radar and it became increasingly dreamlike - but rather than making it feel more sinister it just became bland. The ending was an absolute disappointment and I feel very flat...I could sense that there wasn't going to be a real resolution by the last quarter but I was hoping that there would at least be an emotional one. Sadly, it didn't come through.

Horace Derwent says

it's not a horror novel, but more like a horror novel to me

some echoes just ring a bell like what the late mr. piccirilli's a choir of ill children did me before

sisterimapoet says

I'm a fan of John Burnside's writing. I enjoy his pieces in the LRB and recall enjoying his novel 'The Dumb House' when I read it a few years ago.

I had high hopes for this novel. And I did enjoy it a lot. I liked the creepy otherworldlyness of the setting. It felt normal and yet also very strange. It reminded me a bit of Michael Faber's 'Under the Skin'. You recognise the place and the people but something doesn't feel quite right.

I like the ever present tension. But I found myself getting frustrated by the jumping perspective. I would have preferred to stick with one character and to really get to know them and their voice. I also felt the ending spiralled out of control a bit. That was probably the intention, but it felt so tight and restrained throughout that I felt a little let down by it.

One of those books where the writing was superior to the story it carried.

Dean says

I thought it was well written, but at the same time it is a short story that is about 150 pages too long. I kept reading, hoping that something would happen, something related to the premise of the story. When it finally did I was unimpressed and very disappointed. I wish I had followed my gut feeling about this one and stopped after the first 50 pages.

Annie Rosewood says

An average of 3.05? Did we read the same novel?!

I've taken a few days since finishing *The Glisten* to think about it and come down from my excitable state, so that this review didn't read like an incomprehensible smattering of "oh wow!" and "brilliant!". This was only my second Burnside novel, but I feel confident in saying that he is one of my favourite contemporary authors. He writes with such mastery, and the way that he illustrates Innertown and its ghostly, menacing atmosphere is distinct and chilling. I adore how this is written, switching from third person to first and providing the reader with glimpses from different characters but propelling the tale through Leonard's narrative. In the same way that I got anxious as I neared the end of *The Dumb House* and nothing had been resolved, I was intensely curious when I got to the final 30 pages of *The Glisten* and there was no resolution in sight. Just as the town is depicted as bleak, murky, and mysterious, we become implicated through our own confusion at what is going on. Burnside doesn't provide any conclusive answers. I thought that this novel was brilliant before I got to the ending, but once I read the final page, I was in absolute awe. If you're interested in an atmospheric, grey haze type of novel, a Holden Caulfield-type narrator, the familiarity of Lepidoptera in disturbing texts but with a distinctive and sacred twist, you will enjoy this.

Vanessa says

I feel pretty much slap bang in the middle with this one, and that's a bit disappointing if I'm honest. My second foray into Burnside's work was almost a year in the making, and I had high hopes for *Glisten* as apparently it's the writer's favourite of the books he's written. I just found it ultimately to be a bit of a let down.

I'm not sure how to summarize the story, because I didn't really feel like there was much of one really. We follow a couple of different people's perspectives, but for the most part the story is told by a teenage boy named Leonard. He lives in an isolated place called Innertown, overshadowed by a shut-down power plant that has made the population of the town ill. He has a dying father, an unsatisfactory relationship with his girlfriend - and other boys his age have been slowly disappearing over the years. Only the local policeman Morrison seems to know anything about it.

One thing that I think Burnside does incredibly well is atmosphere. From the very beginning, he created a creepy, eerie world for the reader to inhabit - although I believe the town is meant to be set somewhere in Scotland, it feels almost otherworldly and fantastical. The people are all quite odd and/or reclusive, the weather is dark and dreary, and the ominous presence of the now defunct power plant is a brilliant addition, making it very easily for me to imagine myself in its shadow at all times.

There are also a couple of points in this book where the events are quite shocking. Burnside can quickly move events on from being bearable to alarmingly violent at the drop of a hat, almost out of nowhere. Some of the images are maybe not for the faint-hearted, but I wouldn't say they were quite as shocking as moments in *The Dumb House*. Still, I can see parts of this book being quite disturbing for readers less inclined to read horror/thrillers.

What in the end let me down was the ending though. It made absolutely no sense, left absolutely no resolution, and was just plain bizarre. Not in a good way either. Although I don't need some massive revelation at the end of the book, it would have been nice to feel like there was some sort of point to the events depicted in earlier pages. Although again the imagery was intriguing, odd, and gruesome at times, it just made the book fall flat in the end, because I felt like Burnside had an idea for a story but never fully worked it out. Disappointing to say the least.

I would recommend trying this book if you like creepy atmospheric reads, but if you're the kind of person who likes a strong plot then this definitely isn't one for you. I will still be reading more of Burnside's work though, as his style is something I really enjoy.

F says

Disappointed. Was not sure of what exactly went on at the end.
The Dumb House was so much better than this one.

Mary Crabtree says

There are moments of recognition, when I turned a page in "The Glister" and had the sense of reading this in a book or seeing this on the big screen before. I felt that "ah ha" moment when a murder scene had elements of "Blair Witch Project" or when a pack of children went all "Lord of the Flies" in the black and poisoned forest of Innertown. I may not be a big fan of this sort of novel but "The Glister" pulled me in with the surprise of great dialogue, a strong central character and depth of story. For all of the surface ugliness of the setting and unsettling plot about disappearing boys, there were fleshed out characters of worth that I rooted for and ultimately made me rush to the very end.

Lori says

A disappointment overall, but only because I was expecting it to be a little... more?

I'm straight down the middle with it, from a rating perspective. There were some amazing and highly quotable lines, so I was able to up my kindle-highlight game a bit since I was reading the mobi version. (sidenote: thank GOD I picked up the kindle version for cheap when it went up on sale.) And the book maintained most of its creepy nature, though at a terribly slow, plodding pace. I was extremely careful when choosing when to stop reading- I pushed through the really slow parts and would put the book down only when I reached a place in which it re-grabbed my attention, knowing that would entice me to pick it back up again, because honestly, there were moments where I was THIS CLOSE to chucking it out of sheer whothefuckcaresness.

Bj says

Billed as a horror novel, this bizarre novel goes nowhere frightening or even ... coherent. Trying to be "abstract" it succeeds only in revealing there are no ideas at the core of this "story."

Sara says

John Burnside's *The Glisten* opens in a modern day ghost town. The chemical plant that once fused the city with life and prosperity has been closed and left to rot. Everything in the town can be described as dead and deformed. The town's adults are apathetic, depressed and diseased. The children are violent, promiscuous, and haunted. But no one ever leaves the town, unless of course, they disappear.

This book is not a typical horror or mystery novel. It's more of a very long dark fable complete with an abstract ending and an obscure moral. This is not an easy read; it can best be described as uncomfortable and difficult. Burnside manages to infuse every aspect of his tales with menace, down to the last comma. There is sex, violence and adult language—the majority of it committed by young adults. It's also the kind of book that may torment its readers for months. If there is a more terrifying or disturbing novel out there, I have yet to read it. I'd warn anyone considering the novel that it is scary and edgy. You may not like it, but you should definitely read it.

Clara says

The Glisten is a story about a once-industrial town, specializing in chemical production, known as Innertown. Now, Innertown is not a place anyone with a right mind would want to live in; the kids are violent with practically no morals, and the adults are either too sick from unknown illnesses or too tired of life to care. And not to mention, approximately every year or so, a boy disappears. Authorities turn a blind eye to this, as does the town's only policeman, and the inhabitants are fed transparent lies about the fate of these boys. Thus, *The Glisten* focuses on a boy called Leonard, whose quest is to find how to survive in a decaying town that is filled with corruption, evil and sickness.

When I first picked up this book, I was immediately captivated by its storyline. I expected dark, twisted tale with a solid plot and a powerful meaning. Unfortunately, I would be a liar if I did not say I was sorely disappointed. What seemed to be an intriguing plot turned out to be half-cooked: unsatisfying and irresolute. The main character, Leonard, who immediately draws pathos from the loss of his best friend, does not act on his own will most of the time, and seems to follow the whims of others instead. He dates a girl he does not like, and he takes part in a gang's activities though he would much rather be far somewhere else. This is not like the boy the book summary described to be, just like how this story isn't. I felt deceived, upon finishing this novel, since the actual plot of this novel had almost no connection to the book's summary, which was what had attracted this novel to me in the first place. The only thing that the summary promised that did take place was that we could see exactly how dysfunctional Innertown was. Other than that, I was let down by what the novel turned out to be.

Though I did not enjoy the plot, I must admit that the mood and atmosphere of this novel was well executed. There was an air of horror and darkness throughout the novel that ensnared readers. The only fault in this is that there was no sense of resolution to balance this. The ending, much to my surprise, was so hazy and

confusing. I felt no sense of satisfaction after I finished reading this novel, as there were still so many unanswered questions. So it was a bit of a pity, that such a fine skill of mood setting was not done justice. The Glisten is not a bad book; it is just unsatisfying. The language and style of writing are effective, but the weak plot and ending damages it. Some people will love it for its abstractness and need for the reader to infer things, but for the others, it will only leave them discontent.

Lucille says

Blisteringly disturbing, creepy, and sometimes shocking: it made me twitch mentally, and once or twice a bit physically too.

Geoff Wooldridge says

There is a little of Stephen King in this tale of mysterious events in an unidentified location, referred to only as Innertown and Outertown, Adjacent these isolated towns is an abandoned chemical plant, once the lifeblood of the community, until its dire effects on the health of the local population became all too apparent.

Now teenage boys are disappearing, and there seems to be a cover-up involving a wealthy local businessman and an incompetent policeman.

After a poor beginning, I became more engaged in the story once the narration was taken over by 15 year old Leonard Wilson.

the story became one of teenage angst, isolation, gang behaviour, sex and violence - directionless youth, completely lacking in parental supervision, running amok. Enter the Moth Man, and the plot takes on yet another twist and element of mystery.

But the writing, although maintaining a fair level of interest and intrigue, was really uneven, varying from very good to completely awful, with several passages that were quite tangential. It seems that Burnside has a plethora of ideas that he wanted to jam in, including multiple literary and film references, but he couldn't quite get his thoughts together in a coherent and meaningful fashion.

The characterisations were quite poor and often implausible. The character of Elspeth, a wantonly promiscuous teenage girl, is a particular case in point.

Ultimately, very little is resolved and the ending is as poor as the beginning. With a bit more care and revision, this could have been a really good novel.. As it stands, it is really only just competent.

Angela says

A richly populated, flawlessly descriptive story, *The Glisten* is a slow-moving but fascinating (and repeatedly

hilarious) novel that tells the story of broken Innertown, a working-class area where the town's only business, a chemical plant with a dubious environmental record, has long shut down and plunged the town into darkness.

The Glisten is neither a traditional horror story or mystery novel, although there's plenty of horror and mystery to it. Burnside creates a Hitchcockian atmosphere of suspense, though the real horror is that none of Innertown's defeated residents seems to notice it. The ravages of the closed down chemical plants aren't just the cancer clusters or mental illness that seem to leave a dying or sick family member in every household; the town has also sunken into a collective hopelessness. No one gets out of Innertown, no one bothers to figure out exactly what the toxic chemicals that have poisoned everyone at the plant are, no one gets particularly agitated when boys of Innertown mysteriously disappear.
