



## The Last Final Girl

*Stephen Graham Jones*

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"The Last Final Girl is like Quentin Tarantino's take on The Cabin in the Woods. Bloody, absurd, and smart. Plus, there's a killer in a Michael Jackson mask." - Carlton Mellick III, author of Apeshit

Life in a slasher film is easy. You just have to know when to die.

Aerial View: A suburban town in Texas. Everyone's got an automatic garage door opener. All the kids jump off a perilous cliff into a shallow river as a rite of passage. The sheriff is a local celebrity. You know this town. You're from this town.

Zoom In: Homecoming princess, Lindsay. She's just barely escaped death at the hands of a brutal, sadistic murderer in a Michael Jackson mask. Up on the cliff, she was rescued by a horse and bravely defeated the killer, alone, bra-less. Her story is already a legend. She's this town's heroic final girl, their virgin angel.

Monster Vision: Halloween masks floating down that same river the kids jump into. But just as one slaughter is not enough for Billie Jean, our masked killer, one victory is not enough for Lindsay. Her high school is full of final girls, and she's not the only one who knows the rules of the game.

When Lindsay chooses a host of virgins, misfits, and former final girls to replace the slaughtered members of her original homecoming court, it's not just a fight for survival-it's a fight to become The Last Final Girl.

## **The Last Final Girl Details**

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## From Reader Review The Last Final Girl for online ebook

### M Griffin says

Told at the full-tilt pace of a teen slasher pic, *The Last Final Girl* by Stephen Graham Jones effectively conveys the author's love and respect for the form. Divided up into very short bites, like a movie is divided into shots of a few seconds each, the story proceeds at a rapid clip, with none of the typical novel's digressions or introspection. It's something like 90% dialog, interspersed with tags almost like shorthand, describing character actions.

The slasher is probably one of the most straight-forward, accessible kinds of movies, but this book is told in an experimental style. Others have likened the format to a screenplay, but it's actually more like an overseeing narrator describing the on-screen action of a film as it happens. It's a verbal play-by-play, describing shots, character movements, what the camera (and audience) sees and notices. The narrator is well-versed in the actors, directors, references, inside jokes and tropes of slasher films.

This results in a fun, cheeky stream-of-consciousness running description, complete with winking asides from the characters and sometimes also the invisible narrator letting the reader in on any references they might've missed. Though the story takes place in the present day, these high school kids are very familiar with cultural touchstones of the 80s (the golden age of the slasher film, as well as the coming-of-age era of the author) so that lines from popular movies and other culture from my own high school years pop up all through the story.

In a sense this is less about literature, in the sense of inward reflection, and more about the kinetic energy of film told in written form. It's clever, full of attitude, crafted by a person who clearly loves, values and understands slasher films as a genre. *The Last Final Girl* is a good-natured, energetic gonzo tale, full of winking references, name-dropping and a non-stop barrage of self-reflexive acknowledgment that Jones is in on the joke and he's enjoying himself in the writing every bit as much as any reader.

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### Ross Lockhart says

A meta-textual homage to the slasher flicks of the 80s with an encyclopedic understanding of the genre's tropes, Stephen Graham Jones's *The Last Final Girl* out-references such films as *Scream* and *Cabin in the Woods* through virtuoso literary technique, cinematic jump cuts, dizzying POV shifts, buckets of blood, and a tongue planted firmly in cheek. As stylish as it is grotesque, *The Last Final Girl* is a campy, absurdist fright-fest, with rival final girls jockeying for survivor status, small-town kink and connectedness, football, a wrecked Halloween truck, and a deranged killer in a Michael Jackson mask. Don't wait for the (inevitable) movie! Read *The Last Final Girl* now, an experience this horrific tour-de-force for yourself!

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### Paul says

A fast, dizzying novel that's a slasher movie script, with players who know all the rules, and break them and rewrite them, and expose them, and like the best traditional tragedies, succumb to them.

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### **Robert Vanneste says**

I liked the premise but not the execution . Disappointing.

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### **Steve Lowe says**

Very good meta-romp of a novel disguised as a slasher film, chock full of nods to classic horror slashers, and some inventive verbs that movie fans will appreciate (like: the killer "Hoddering" after his victim). The style is unique and rather like reading a screenplay, but that has its limitations in that the narrative seemed to lack characterization while also speeding a bit too fast through scenes. I had to re-read a couple parts to get the mental image. It took a bit to adjust to the style, which reminded me of reading Palahniuk's PYGMY, another novel with a unique voice/style throughout. But once you get the cadence down, and once you get to the bloody third act, you'll be hooked.

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### **Eddie Generous says**

#### Unnerving Magazine Review

This is the fourth Stephen Graham Jones release I've read this year. Each story has been something else, none reading like the last, despite carrying the familiar and ever-welcome voice of the everyday human. Push this feeling a step further with Last Final Girl.

Stylistically, this is something I'd never read before. It's like reading film as you watch it, and more so than a reading a screenplay. It's a novel, but clipped and fast and fantastically encompassing. Oddly enough, despite it being unusual, even experimental, in style, it's an easy and engaging read.

If I didn't already know the tidbit previously, reading this book would reveal the author's love for Scream and the on screen (page) deconstruction of the slasher story. The characters carry all the realness necessary to pass of emotional tugs, while also smuggling secrets, peculiar idiosyncrasies, and hero-level readiness (a must for most slasher tales).

This story is fun in ways most books can touch. I was entertained from the first page to the last. There is zero fat on this cut.

To sum, it's speedy in pace, so much so that you're yanked to and from action something like a discarded and then remembered dog toy. The scene description is big enough to fuel the imagination, letting the mind play a movie. The writing is smart and clean. I am wholly impressed by this story, I look forward to tackling Jones' back catalogue and everything forthcoming.

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### **Hannah Stoutenburg says**

This is, hands down, the biggest reading disappointment for me of the last few years. When a book is so unanimously loved by reviewers and compared so often to Cabin in the Woods, I expected it to be a lot better.

One of the hardest things about this book was the narrative style. It works like a film, cutting away for effect,

sometimes ending a scene mid-sentence. We're treated to the image of somebody hammering a sword, masks floating in the water, and newspaper clippings. Close-ups, POV images, scenery pans...I'm not a film critic and most of the terminology escapes me but that's what Jones is going for. And I appreciate it on a purely artistic level (I've never read another book like that before) but I found that it created a disjointed mess. I found myself reading then re-reading the same passage over and over just to figure out what was happening. Characters got jumbled up and the action was hard to follow. If everything else in this book had been perfect, I think this storytelling method still would have removed me so far from the story that I wouldn't have been able to enjoy it fully.

But the rest WASN'T perfect.

The dialog was at once realistic and muddled, revealing very little about the characters. Most of the time I was barely even aware of what was being said. In fact, the characters was THE biggest issue. I hated everybody. Izzy is an obnoxious, self-centered moron. Final girls are supposed to be sympathetic. They need redeeming qualities besides an intact hymen. Absolutely every ounce of bad juju in this story comes from her piss-poor attitude and even worse decisions.

None of the characters were remotely sympathetic, in fact. I didn't have as much reason to hate any of them as I did with Izzy so perhaps my apathy comes from the story telling. I don't know a single one of them. I spent 300 pages (or whatever number it is) in their world and I don't have a freaking clue about a single person. Except that there's two guys who like to get busy in the shower. Shockingly, that's the one clear memory I have from this book. Huh.

So the narrative was jarring, Izzy was a imbecile, and there weren't nearly enough redeeming qualities in the novel to make up for the cheesiness. It wasn't subversive, either. There was nothing new except for the twist at the end which was overwhelmed by the absolute mess that came before it.

I did like the car scene, though. On the school's track. That's always one of my favorite ways for a character to die. Gruesome, slow, and excruciating.

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### **Simon Logan says**

Gah, I really wanted to like this one but in the end I lost the battle.

I can understand why Jones went for the stylistic approach of giving it a cinematic feel and after an initial struggle I began to find my way with it however in the end I found that the style got in the way of me connecting to and enjoying the book, rather than having it enhance the story.

I got about 1/2 the way through before giving up and I may well return to it in the future.

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### **Boden Steiner says**

Cabin in the Woods was certainly cool for any horror fan, but I'd rather have my winks and nudges self-aware, yet played dramatically straight. Horror for the horror audience, and in this case, a slasher to stand on the shoulders of every slasher, on top of it, perhaps allowing the mask to come off a bit, but, in the subtext of

that, revealing that our modern life, steeped in trivia and the realities created by our pop culture passions (demons), is self-aware, but can still prove to be a very fleshy target.

No, don't pull the curtains or elbow me in the ribs. Just run the skewer straight at me and see if I can catch it. In this regard, Stephen Graham Jones takes the deconstruction to the next level, creating something smarter and far more dramatic than any recent post-slasher slasher (cringe) without losing the fun and scares that make the genre so entertaining.

This is a novel, and that luxury allows Jones to direct everything, even give you the commentary that you are already thinking, because like that voice-over feature on a DVD, he's watching this unfold with us. He created it, but you get the sense that in creating it, he's also a fan reading it with us, watching it on a battered VHS for the twenty-fifth time. That passion is there. He's laughing, cringing, grinning. It's that same joy that delivered his Demon Theory "trilogy", though here, his approach is tighter, weaving all of the footnote sweetness into the guts of his narrative.

And for all that knowing going on, *The Last Final Girl* is still a mystery, with guilt and doubt thrust upon every character. Lots of fantastic dialogue, some great set pieces, and a very subtle John Hughes (or *Three O'Clock High*) vibe making you wonder what kind of film Hughes might have made if he were interested in horror. This might be an answer, or as close to an answer as we might have. I wish Hughes were around to ponder such possibility.

Regardless, *The Last Final Girl* is now loose, out there waiting, there for every slasher fan, and slasher fans need to know--they will know. Hollywood can only try to keep up. Make it, or top it.

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### **Paxton Cockrell says**

I'd heard about this book long before I picked it up, and I thought the premise was cool so I really wanted to like it. Unfortunately, the book just wasn't put together that well. Now, I still think the premise was interesting and done a little bit differently, it could be really awesome.

So, the primary problem with *The Last Final Girl*, is how it was written. It's clear that Mr. Jones saw this story in film form. So the book is written in some pseudo script form with lots of lines describing camera moves and scene cuts. I wish he had gone in one way or the other and made it a full script or went with a full novel because the weird in-between that it is makes the book tedious to read through.

The other problem I had is how meta the book was. Everyone seemed hyper aware of the fact that they were in a horror story and it didn't really explain why. It got sort of tiresome that everyone seemed aware of what was going to happen next took away some of the guessing.

So overall, a great idea, just not executed well.

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### **David Keaton says**

This review is apt to be a bit bias, as this is what usually happens when readers becomes delusional enough to think a novel was written specifically for them. That's the case here though, as Mr. Jones has crafted a

book so far up inside the head of a horror movie fan that its likely to read like Morse Code to a civilian. Their confusion is their loss though because something very unique is happening with this narrative, something that will likely be misinterpreted as an attempt to half-novelize a screenplay. But it only resembles a screenplay at first glance, mostly because of the clever arrows and whiplash descriptions of the next "shot." But the difference here is all the difference - what is usually lost in a screenplay format (and in a film), particularly the moves only a novel can make up, down, and all around the action (and up in everyone's heads, of course), can now be relished instead of distilled, making this not quite screenplay, not quite novel, but a new hybrid machine hand-tooled for maximum enjoyment by a specific audience. The premise, a gathering of familiar names, "Jamie (Lee Curtis)," "Ripley," "Crystal (B)lake," etc., reminders of famous "last final girls" who should have earned the right to finally relax after surviving their respective horror movies, now in danger of being picked off by a nut in a Whacko Jacko mask, is just as fun as Jones' previous *Zombie Bake-Off* (also put out by Lazy Fascist), and just as smart and subversive as that book. Things get twistier, and in spite of the positively Aztec levels of bloody sacrifice, what Jones would never dream of sacrificing are the expectations of any good horror show. The author is so confident in his knowledge of horror tropes that he never subverts those expectations when it comes time to satisfy. It's also crammed with movie references until the quips are spilling out its mouth, and has a special prize at the bottom of the box for Michael Martin Murphey "Wildfire" fans (actually this tribute got shook to the top of the cereal box). This book is a love letter to slasher cinema, to doomed Last Final Girls everywhere, and to every boy or girl who loved them enough to just eat their popcorn and enjoy watching them die.

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### **Katie McGuire says**

I should've loved this book. And I did—for the first fifty pages, or so, until the references turned out to be exhausting rather than fun, and the action ramped up but only got more confusing as more finally happened. This is a brilliant premise executed only decently well, leaving a lot of questions because it's more interested in being clever than coherent. Still, I enjoyed the ride, and recommend it for slasher fans looking for a quick read.

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### **Orrin Grey says**

This isn't necessarily Stephen's best book, and I missed the footnotes from *Demon Theory*, but it feels in a lot of ways like the book he was born to write, the book he's been training for all this time. At once quicker and more effortless than *Demon Theory*, it uses the same film-treatment-as-novel format to create the ultimate meta-slasher, something that is at once a perfect slasher novel and the perfect deconstruction of slasher stories, at once more traditional and more clever than the movies that it emulates. Stephen Graham Jones has been studying for this one his whole life, and it shows.

Like I said, it may not be his best book, but if I had to point to any one book of his and say, "Start there," this'd probably be the one.

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### **David says**

For anyone who watched waaaaay too many slasher flicks in the 80s and 90s, this book is a cyclopedic homage to every movie Jamie Lee Curtis ever starred in, every Jason, Michael, and Freddy, every sorority

house and boy scout camp and cabin in the woods. I watched a lot of those movies as a teen, but Stephen Graham Jones must have a DVD collection to raise Vincent Price from the grave. I probably only caught two-thirds of the references.

The story is, of course, a slasher flick. With a twist.

"Lindsay's right," Izzy says, collecting the leftovers. "Billie Jean is coming back for her. With a little help from his friends."

"So . . . so is this a horror movie now, or a teen comedy?" Brittney says.

"It's an afterschool special," Izzy says, Hoddering her head over to study Billie Jean. "Know what the take-home message is? Don't fuck with Izzy Stratford."

Lindsay, the "Final Girl" in the movie that ended in the opening chapter, survived an encounter with a slasher-killer in a Michael Jackson mask. Now as homecoming queen, she's going to lead her high school in a celebration of life and survival, and she's chosen a handful of other very special girls for her court.

They're all Final Girls who survived their own teen bloodbaths.

Since this is a slasher film, and Stephen Graham Jones is not going to neglect a single trope, even Izzy, the confused odd girl out, knows that a homecoming game with a cast right out of every scary movie ever can only end in blood.

*The Last Final Girl* is fun, if you find movies like *Halloween* and *My Bloody Valentine* and *Nightmare on Elm Street* fun. And it tries - it tries so very, very hard - to be clever. But it's not quite as clever as it tries to be. It's been billed as a literary version of Joss Whedon's *Cabin in the Woods*, but it's not a deconstruction so much as a tongue-in-cheek fan fiction collage. The characters, all of them, are genre-savvy and *know* they are in a horror flick, so they try to outsmart fate, even knowing that the rules aren't going to let them all survive. The author tries to keep us in suspense about who's really the villain, but like many slasher films, it kind of spins out of control during the bloody finale. But hey, who says they have to make sense?

The writing style will definitely not be to everyone's taste. It's written in present tense screenplay format, complete with camera directions:

→ and now Billie Jean's clambering easily over the rail after Izzy and Ben, Izzy falling backwards and up, her POV looking ahead, where they're going: to the top rail.

A dead end. A fast drop. Just like the cliff.

"Stupid girls run upstairs, stupid girls run upstairs," she's saying to herself, turning to pull Ben with her up the aluminum steps, Billie Jean just feet behind them,

→ Crystal down on the track, Billie Jean in the crosshairs of Dante's rifle, about to have his insides opened up.

"Now, you fucker," Crystal says, and pulls the trigger.

On nothing.

She doesn't understand this gun.

It really does convey the sense of being in a movie, watching from seats sticky with artificial butter through the alternating POV of a stalking serial killer and spunky teenagers, but it also gets annoying after a while.

I almost wanted to rate this 4 stars, but the writing style wore on me and while there were some good jokes, they weren't quite funny enough to elevate this to true satire, let alone genius. Definitely a fun read for any horror fan, but it's mostly just a celebration of all those R-rated blood-and-guts-and-titty-fests of our (well, my) youth.

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### **Emily says**

\*\*Review coming soon!\*\*

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