



## The Death House

*Sarah Pinborough*

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## **The Death House** Sarah Pinborough

Toby's life was perfectly normal... until it was unravelled by something as simple as a blood test.

Taken from his family, Toby now lives in the Death House: an out-of-time existence far from the modern world, where he, and the others who live there, are studied by Matron and her team of nurses. They're looking for any sign of sickness. Any sign of their wards changing. Any sign that it's time to take them to the sanatorium.

No one returns from the sanatorium.

Withdrawn from his house-mates and living in his memories of the past, Toby spends his days fighting his fear. But then a new arrival in the house shatters the fragile peace, and everything changes.

Because everybody dies. It's how you choose to live that counts.

## **The Death House Details**

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Author : Sarah Pinborough

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## From Reader Review The Death House for online ebook

### Mari says

IM SO ANGRY. AND upset...

(some spoilers ahead)

This book has managed to keep me up all night (and I have to get up in less than four hours now to go to an appointment, then go to work for a night shift). It made me shed tears. I started up LOVING it... And you leave me with a 'Romeo and Juliet' slash 'Titanic' mash up ending, Sarah? Are you, really??? So much cheese I can taste Camembert on the tip of my tongue. And I actually do like my books romantic and dramatic (maybe not a mix of both at the same time, though, but I could get over that). Just not the \*cheap melodramatic telenovela\* (i.e. all exaggeration and emotional manipulation and bad acting) kind of dramatic.

This could've honestly been an amazing read, but then, alas, the romance and the [complete and absolute lack of] worldbuilding (and just *any* kind of background and mythology) happened..... And still. I could've overlooked that. I've done it before - ignores the shitty mythology and such, simply because there was something special going on in the book. And in *The Death House* - there was. For a while. I had a few problems with the story, but some of them I could get past. As for the others - I was counting on the ending to bring me answers. Then I reached the ending.... and it had the effect of a gust of wind on a card house on me, and the feelings that come with it, i.e. anger and fatigue and disappointment. I spent hours building the thing, and it got destroyed in a matter of half a second.

The worst part is that, seeing how this book is actually pretty well written (although a bit repetitive), it made me feel things so deeply and care so much that, despite the beyond disappointing finale, right now I still care about the characters and their struggles, and I'm so angry and worked up and distressed that I cannot possibly go to sleep just like that. This is going to be a long and difficult night at work, I can feel it.

I just-- I was expecting so much more. It felt like..you know, when you start watching a movie and think it might not be some Oscar worthy chef-d'oeuvre, but still really entertaining and enjoyable, but then you check the director and it says Uwe Boll and you're like, *oh fuck*.

And what even are answers? The author throws in all these details and mysteries, and then leaves us with absolutely nothing. No resolution to any of the problems. (view spoiler) The plot honestly seems like it hasn't been thought out at all. AT ALL. I get it that the book is mostly character driven, that Toby's (and others') journey as a person is what's important, but still. You ought to make the background seem semi coherent at the very least. And it wasn't. It wasn't at all. In the end it all seemed like a sorry excuse for that tragicomic (because it IS damn hilarious and I would've laughed, had I not been overwhelmed with disgust) finale.

Throughout the entire book, all the author did was withhold info (some of it obvious (view spoiler), and so all the more irritating), but I persevered. I thought I was in for some super duper mind blowing twist or something. And I got... that ending. All of this potential for THAT. ENDING. And none of my questions answered.

ANYWAY.

I just-- My heart honestly aches for these children and their parents (I mean, God! Toby's mom... When he talked about her reaction to his leaving and his dad and--) and how they were treated by the author. I have this lump in my throat and I'm actually crying just thinking about some of them. I'm so outraged and I'm hurting so much, I don't know what words to express it with.

Some of Toby's musings hit really close to home, too, so it simultaneously makes everything better (because I love books that manage to capture my inner world so well) and worse.

*'Trees live for hundreds of years.' she says softly.*

*I try and imagine a hundred years from now. Everyone alive now will be gone. It will be all new people rushing around and thinking they're important. My head spins a bit. Even here, in the Death House, after what I saw last night, I still can't imagine the world going on without me in it. I envy the tree.*

[...]

*'We'll go into earth.' she says. 'And then our atoms will race around the world together, completely free.'*

*It's a nice thought, but it's still not enough to ease my dread. I want to be me. I want to be me for ever and I know I'll fight tooth and nail to keep my life as long as possible.*

I'm so sad.

(I really am a sobbing mess right now, and it's not because of the *ending* ending, not the final "event" itself, (like I said, that was emotionally manipulative BS and I'm not standing up for it), but the fact that it happened, the fact that the author thought it was a good idea to make it happen. And also just the general situation and then also what happened to some of the characters, and what's awaiting the others... I don't know how to deal with this. And I'm sure it's also because of the lack of sleep but sleeping is not an option now, or is it, I don't even know.)

This book had the potential to be a truly heart-wrenching read without all the melodrama and -I'm gonna say it again- emotional manipulation. I wish the author had had faith in her skills and hadn't thought *that* ending was necessary. Or, at least, had been [much] more subtle about it. (view spoiler)

I said the romance irritated me, and it did, grandly, but it was bearable somehow (=because I had EXPECTATIONS and HOPES for the finale this book would (but didn't) eventually deliver. UGH). I find hormonal teenagers' PoVs infinitely amusing (and endearing tbh?), so Toby's inner struggles were great. His first interactions with Clara were sweet. I even got used to the forever annoying "I love you"s etc., because, after I'd spent some time bitching about it, I put myself in these characters' situation and thought that maybe they **needed** to exaggerate everything, including their feelings, because they only had a few days -maybe weeks, and at most months- to live, and they just needed what little time they had left to be as intense as it could get.

BUT THEN THE ENDING.

I don't even know what I'm writing anymore. I'm disappointed and heartbroken is what I'm saying. What I

know is this book started as a 5/5, then became a 4/5 because -as I said above- it was a bit repetitive and the romance was beginning to grate on my nerves.

And then it was a 3/5 because "tru luv 5eva :'-)))))))" and thanks but no thanks.

Now here we are.

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### **Kate says**

One of those rare books for which there are just not enough stars. Beautiful. And now I must go and wring out my heart.

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### **Basia says**

Well, how about that? Silly me! Turns out, I've read this book before. Perhaps last year sometime? But by the time I was certain (denial denial denial) that I'd read this already, I chose to just keep going to the end.

It's such a sad, sweet story. Something cataclysmic has happened to the world. Worse, some godawful disease persists, and lives inside some of the surviving people. Everyone is tested. Those who test positive are yanked out of society at large to reside in these death houses, where they await the expression of this awful gene, which always devastates those who are going to be affected by age 18.

So what we have here is a YA post-apocalyptic tale about how a group of pre-teens deal with imminent death. The writing was mesmerizing enough that I felt myself rooting for these characters as they attempted to squeeze in as much living as possible into whatever time they had left. I too would become hopeful with them. I also felt sad with them. I especially loved celebrating whenever they did.

The relationships between these characters were so vividly portrayed. It was enough to create a sort of topographical map in my head, describing their individual personalities. And how they interacted? Wonderful. I particularly loved the transitions these kids went through while living together in this house, without their parents, family, or any loved ones. And the ending was great.

Good story. 4 and 1/4 stars.

So why am I not rating this higher? Well, I feel guilty giving it more than 4.25 stars because IT finally happened to me at a time when I was paying attention: I started reading a book I thought was brand new to me, and then realized I'd read it before. Thus I'm trying to understand, what happened in between?! I may not recall WHEN I read this lovely little tale, but I remember clearly how moved I was as I read the story, and even for some time after. And yet, it turns out it's one of those books, you guys! You know, those books you LOVE when you read and finish, then completely forget about after?? That's a phenomenon I didn't understand before this book, nor do I get it now. With the way I felt about this book after finishing it initially, I'd have thought I'd recognize it immediately, within a page or few. I LOVED Toby. Yeah, I was in denial eventually, but not at 1st.

Having said all this, please don't let it dissuade you from exploring this little book. I really did enjoy it, the first time through especially. Happy reading!

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### **Karl says**

Toby lives in the Death House located on a remote British island. The top floor of the Death House is known as the sanatorium, where kids disappear/are taken to in the middle of the night and never return. The motto in the death house is "No one returns from the sanatorium".

Children are brought to the death house a few at a time knowing they have not got long to live. The children know that they are "defective" and thus try to ignore their inevitable fate. They have minimal supervision yet are cared for by nurses and teachers. They range in age from nine or ten to early teens.

Further, something has happened in the world, yet we are never told exactly what, it is all cleverly implied through the children's observations. It is also implied that some form of climate change has also occurred as the temperature has never been this cold in this part of the world.

Ms. Pinborough has written a beautifully told story. She has captured the lives, fears, small pockets of happiness and the complexity of the lives and losses of those involved. The hopes, loves and fears of the characters are superbly evoked before a heart-rending yet inevitable conclusion.

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### **J.H. Moncrieff says**

This book was nothing like I expected. I thought it would be an adult horror, and instead I got a YA love story. And it was so damn brilliant I'm still in shock.

"The Death House" reminds me a lot of John Wyndham's "The Chrysalids." There are a lot of similar themes. I've seen some reviewers complain about unanswered questions in this book, but to me, Pinborough's brilliance is in what she DOESN'T tell you, and in that way it reminds me of Josh Malerman's "The Bird Box." If she had focused on the disease or what happened to the world, for instance, this would have become a been-there, read-that dystopian novel, but Pinborough deftly sidesteps that tired old trope.

I'll admit this book requires a heaping helping of suspension of disbelief. Toby, the protagonist, is a little \*too\* slow to figure stuff out sometimes--he's too smart to be that obtuse, and you know from the beginning that this isn't going to be a bright, happily ever after story, as he should have figured out, but it's so beautifully done.

It's such a pleasure to read a book that makes you just say, "Wow," when it's finished.

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### **Aditi says**

*"Hate looks like everybody else until it smiles"*

----Tahereh Mafi

Sarah Pinborough, an English-born horror writer, has penned a gripping and dark young adult thriller, *The Death House* that revolves around a thirteen year old boy who has been whisked away from his family after a negative blood test into *The Death House*, where he will be observed under the care of some nurses for any sign of sickness which will decide his fate whether he will or will not be taken to the sanatorium, the ultimate end.

### **Synopsis:**

*Toby's life was perfectly normal...until it was unraveled by something as simple as a blood test.*

*Taken from his family, Toby now lives in the Death House; an out-of-time existence far from the modern world, where he, and the others who live there, are studied by Matron and her team of nurses. They're looking for any sign of sickness. Any sign of their wards changing. Any sign that it's time to take them to the sanatorium.*

*No one returns from the sanatorium.*

*Withdrawn from his house-mates and living in his memories of the past, Toby spends his days fighting his fear. But then a new arrival in the house shatters the fragile peace, and everything changes.*

*Because everybody dies. It's how you choose to live that counts.*

Very soon Toby's not-so-happening life was going to turn perfect when his crush invited him to a party, and it felt obvious to Toby that somehow that girl too might like him. But his life turns worse, as one fine day he is almost snatched away from his parents into a big van that took him to an idle house located somewhere away from human existence, where he shall be treated under the care of the Matron and a few nurses for any sign of sickness, and if a simple sign of illness is observed, he shall be taken into a life leading to the top floor of the house, where the sanatorium is located, from where no one ever comes back except the nurses. Although, the fear of being taken away never left Toby, still he made friends in his dorm where he slept with a bunch of boys of his age, also they continued their studies. And one fine day, Toby gets a meaning into his life while waiting for his turn to be dead, another van arrives with some new children and among them someone catches Toby's eyes and heart, and together they shall learn to overcome and escape the fear and this pathetic lifestyle.

From the synopsis, the book sounds very creepy, although the author failed to portray that intensity of creepiness that a reader will be expecting after reading the book's synopsis. The book's cover image is dark and throws a terrifying feel to the story line and it holds a power to instantly grasp the readers' attention towards the story. Yet from the very start of the story, the readers will find themselves losing into Toby's tragic and mysterious life that even he has no knowledge of. But midway through the book, the main focus of the story shifts towards undying bond of friendship, young love and petty fights filled with lots of adventure.

The author's writing style is really strong and emphatic and is laced with intense darkness to drown the readers into its depth. The narrative is catchy, mystifying and very much genuine, hence the readers won't find it easy to comprehend with the story line. The pacing varies, from being very fast to being moderate, as

often the readers will be curious and vouching for something worse to happen with the characters, until the very shocking climax that will completely blow their minds off.

The author's world building is quite well developed and believable in the eyes of the readers although the author leaves her readers curious with lots of unanswered questions about this world, where children are taken to *The Death House* based on a blood test that resulted negative because of their "Defective" gene, but who are taking them and what they are doing to those with the "Defective" gene will remain very unclear to the readers. Otherwise, the backdrop of a secluded island synced perfectly with the story line.

The characters are really fantastic, as they are laced with realism in their demeanor. The main character, Toby, is a young boy, who is brave beyond his innocence and tender age and quite mature, as that is obvious from the way Toby precepts things in his wrecked life. His friendship with other children from the house is extraordinarily brilliant and I believe young boys like Toby can fathom with his thoughtful attitude. The rest for the characters are not that well developed, as they act as sidelines for Toby's story.

In a nutshell, this dark and compelling story will turn out to be a hypnotic read for the readers and I bet young adult fans will love this piece of fiction.

**Verdict:** *Be prepared to be terrified with this edgy yet mysterious story.*

**Courtesy:** *Thanks to the author, Sarah Pinborough's, publicist from Hachette, for giving me an opportunity to read and review this book.*

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### **Mientras Leo says**

Una entretenida novela juvenil que dura un suspiro, aunque me hubiera gustado que explorase un poquito más la psicología de sus personajes  
<http://entremontonesdelibros.blogspot...>

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### **Paul says**

As a rule, the things that frighten me are the things I tend to become most obsessed with. Death is right up there at the top of the list. It's that ultimate fear of the unknown and I actively spend a great deal of my free time thinking about it. I know that may sound a horribly morbid, but honestly it not. I've come to the conclusion that this fear is what drives many people in their day to day lives; they may not even be consciously aware of it, but it is always there driving them on. What would happen though if you were forced to face this fear head on? How would you cope with this realisation if it occurred before you had even started to live your life properly?

Toby is angry at the world, angry at a fate that has ripped him away from him family and left him to see out his days without them. He has lost interest in everything and everyone else. Little by little, his is becoming more introverted and less engaged with the world. When Clara arrives in Toby's life, he has just about reached rock bottom. She is the polar opposite to everything he is used to. Clara is an enigma, a free spirit. She lives in the moment and dreams of escape. Her only thoughts are of enjoying whatever time she has left

somewhere far away from their forced incarceration. As their relationship deepens and feelings develop on both sides, Toby begins to imagine a possible life beyond the walls of the house.

The evolving relationship between the two is where the writing excels. There are a host of scenes where it becomes easy to forget that Toby and Clara are still just teenagers, and others where it is all too obvious that they both still are. Though they are among the older residents of the house they still suffers from all the angst and inner turmoil that plague most teens. On top of all that, they have to face their own mortality with the realisation they will never reach adulthood. The writing deftly taps into that sense of hopelessness, confusion and the aching pain of isolation.

The rest of the characters are just as well observed, all have their different coping mechanisms for dealing with their life sentence. There is Jake, the blustering violent bully, or Eleanor who loses herself in the pages of her precious books and Ashley who has turned to religion in order to try and cope the with situation. My personal favourite though, is a young boy called Will. His journey really struck a chord. The most poignant scene in the entire novel is all about him and a single moment in his life.

There is a deliberate ambiguity surrounding the details of the condition that has resulted in Toby and his fellow inmates finding themselves in the Death House. The symptoms, the cause and history of the disease remain a mystery. The origins of the sickness are alluded to, but never fully revealed. It struck me that the genre elements are so subtle you could be forgiven for missing them. They could probably be completely removed and you would still have a first class piece of fiction

Thematically, I was reminded of two films: *Never Let Me Go* and *How I Live Now*. If you enjoyed either, or both, of these movies then, *The Death House* will most definitely appeal. Both films and the book are intimate portraits of difficult situations and feature casts made exclusively young characters. Like its celluloid counterparts *The Death House* is a coming of age story. This is about a group of children starting to make the difficult transition to adulthood. It's the small moments that really make this writing stand out. Pinborough has a delicate touch and she uses this skill to scatter the narrative with insightful scenes. This isn't just a book about children waiting to face their inevitable end, it is so much more. The simple but engrossing plot takes time to explore and pick apart the harsh realities of institutionalised living. I defy anyone to read this and not feel empathy towards every character that has been consigned to the house.

I love books like this, the sort of fiction that promotes introspection. How would I cope if I found myself in the same situation as Toby? When I was a teen could I have dealt with the immense pressures that he faces? As I recall I considered myself all but indestructible. Facing up to the imminent prospect of death would be an entirely alien concept.

I've always considered it the trickiest of skills, trying to capture genuine emotion in fiction, but there are a select few authors who make it look effortless. This beautiful story ends on a pitch-perfect bittersweet note. I'll happily admit, I felt emotionally drained when I got to the last page. I've been thinking about it ever since, and I reckon that *The Death House* is right up there with *The Language of Dying* as one of Sarah Pinborough's best works. This is a touching tale that will linger long after you've finished reading, haunting and heartbreakingly sad.

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### **Nikki says**

I mostly skimmed this book, because the whole creeping fear of the illness thing... it gets to me. It's one of

the things my anxiety does to me: just a constant sense that my body is a ticking timebomb, and sooner or later, something will go wrong. I don't need the idea of a test to tell if you're Defective, a whole society that condones locking people who have that gene away. So, yeah, I mostly skimmed this one.

It's not a bad story, actually. I wasn't sure, from the concept, but I did find myself getting absorbed and stopping to read some sections. The writing is pretty good — there are some really gorgeous bits, particularly at the end. That last line, "I'm not afraid" — ahh. Lovely.

The creepiness and suspense, well, what with trying to avoid the details of the illness and so on, I didn't really get a full sense of that. Neil Gaiman blurbed it, though, so you can see what kind of audience this is aiming at, the tone that it goes for. In this case, bear in mind that the rating I give it is a compromise between how good I think the book is (probably four stars) and my discomfort with the subject matter (two stars), since I rate things according to my personal enjoyment.

Originally posted here.

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### **Bradley says**

Sarah Pinborough?'s *The Death House* is a stunning, powerful, painful, and yes, beautiful, read. The speculative elements are slight, but all the more intriguing for it. The focus is squarely on the main character, Toby, and the sudden turn of events that lands him in the Death House alongside other children who've suffered the same fate. Its brilliance is in the characters and the whiplash of emotions they (and you) go through during this short, engrossing read. Fans of Neil Gaiman, *Lord of the Flies*, and light psychological horror should give this a go.

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### **Miriam Smith says**

This was my first Sarah Pinborough book and with "The Death House" being a win in the Goodreads Giveaways I was most certainly looking forward to reading it.

I started off loving this book, the premise of a story involving a 'Death House' where children with a 'defective' gene live, after being forcibly taken from their homes and families, sounded very intriguing . If they start to become ill they are escorted during the night to the mysterious sanatorium which can only be accessed by a lift. This floor has never been seen by anyone - and children who go there never return. The opening page of the children chatting and talking about rumours that 'first it makes you mad, then your eyes bleed' made me very curious.

However, this book is blurbed as a dystopian love story, not the thriller I was potentially hoping for and I suppose this type of story is just not my thing. The story never seemed to go anywhere and started to become a little repetitive. I don't normally not finish books but with a pile of books to read staring at me from the other side of the room, I decided that at a third of the way through not to continue.

It's not the book, it's definitely me, which is why I'm grading it a three star as it's still excellently written, has a decent enough plot line (if that's your genre) and is penned by a well known and established author. Just not for me.

3 stars.

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## Regina says

I think there will be many people who will love The Death House. Especially among the YA audience.

Life, death, love, friendship, secrets and coming of age are all explored amongst a backdrop of children and teens who are 'defective' and have been removed from society into a boarding school style house to die.

Well written, enjoyable, easy to read. I can see people will become highly emotionally invested in the characters in this book

Thankyou to Netgalley and the publisher for the chance to read and review.

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## Maxine (Booklover Catlady) says

This book had me quite conflicted and somewhat lost at times. After I read the synopsis I was super excited and expected a somewhat dark, brooding and chilling book set in this big old house. This was not quite how it came across to me. But first the blurb that drew me in:

*Toby's life was perfectly normal . . . until it was unravelled by something as simple as a blood test.*

*Taken from his family, Toby now lives in the Death House; an out-of-time existence far from the modern world, where he, and the others who live there, are studied by Matron and her team of nurses. They're looking for any sign of sickness. Any sign of their wards changing. Any sign that it's time to take them to the sanatorium.*

### ***No one returns from the sanatorium.***

So Toby is one of not that many children that live in this large, mostly unused house. Each of the children have been deemed to have the "Defective" gene and at the first sign of illness, in the middle of the night the sick child ends upstairs in the sanatorium. These children live knowing this is where they will die but they don't know much more, not even what this gene is or what happens "upstairs".

The Matron and Nurses in the home are like ghosts, we don't get to know them as characters, they hardly talk to the children or interact at all in a pleasant way, they administer "vitamins" at bedtime and attend to basic supervision, but they are bland and colourless, as is the house. I pictured them with no faces when reading.

Most of the book for me consisted of the children interacting, friendships made and broken, arguments, annoyances and it seemed to read like a middle grade book and/or teens book. Basically tales of kids in a large boarding school kind of (the kids here even go to lessons which are pointless).

But there is always this undercurrent of tension, fear relating to getting sick and being taken to "that" room.

Toby keeps to himself, to his surprise one day a new child turns up at the home and a close relationship blossoms, a real connection that becomes **central** to the rest of the book. By far this new addition to the

house was my favourite and most wonderful character. Like a splash of colour against a beige backdrop.

**I can honestly say that nothing at all of interest happened for me until 85% through this book, it was a very slow-burner to say the least, very character driven but I felt many of the children were featureless, all the same, bland.**

What saves this book is the astounding end part of the story and finale, it's like the book suddenly woke up and decided to be interesting. I was moved beyond words, it's powerfully emotive and led me to feel sad, angry, frustrated and pained. That was just the lead up part - the actual last pages just broke me into a million pieces, beautifully written with so much said without words being used. I cried, just a little, one or two tears.

BUT overall this book was too slow and bland for me, the ending pushes this up to 3.5 stars and I am a bit baffled at other very high ratings, I feel like I have missed the point or something. I would recommend because individual tastes may love this book. The ending alone is almost worth reading it for.

**My biggest gripe? Too many significant questions left not answered.**

*Thank you for my ARC copy of this book thanks to the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.*

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### **Ellie says**

Sarah does an amazing job of capturing the male teenage voice. The fact that Toby isn't a particularly likable character to me, proves this point. I can sympathise with his situation though, and slowly his better qualities comes through. He's a good big brother to the younger boys in his dorm, even if somewhat grudgingly.

Little of their classes in included in the story, for the main they are inconsequential for them; they're not going to use their lessons learned after all. However one key thing they are reading in class, which can hardly be coincidental, is Lord of the Flies. In the house, the kids are mostly left to themselves and they form their own social hierarchy. Those who show weakness (first signs of illness) are shunned by the group.

There was one thing which distracted me a little. The way the defectiveness is introduced made me think it wasn't logical. A genetic defect that's only becomes detectable after time, not at birth and the need to isolate them from society just didn't make sense to me. What would make their families just give them up like that? However, enough is suggested near the end that explains it enough for me. I just wish my brain hadn't got attached to that particular niggle.

It's not really about the outside world at all. There are little hints, like the change in climate, and the flashbacks to how Toby came to be in the Death House. We know there are other houses like it around the country. But the children have been separated from the greater world, and this story is about them. It's insular and intimate, but with a sense of dread pervading. Is there hope? Or are they right to just accept their fate?

I liked that is wasn't about the children fighting the system or being unlikely saviours for mankind, as we so often see. I do think it's one you're going to want to discuss afterwards, there is so much not told, but enough to make assumptions. Have we all made the same ones?

Review copy provided by publisher.

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## Ctgt says

### **A forgotten building on a forgotten island where forgotten children live.**

An interesting story of a near future(?) world where children are tested until they reach the age of eighteen for some sort of abnormality, if they test positive they are sent to what they call The Death House. In any story with kids and teenagers there is the risk of becoming a YA schmaltz-fest but while there was a love story it never dipped in to the "Oh God, here we go" territory.

I will say right from the top, if you are the type of person who likes all the answers in a story you will not like this book. There are so many things left unanswered, from the "terrible time that nearly broke the world", what really happens to the kids as they are taken to the top floor when they become ill, to why these kids are taken to the island in the first place.

There are two main POVs, Toby and Clara who end becoming an item but there are many other secondary kids and watching alliances and friendships develop is an interesting aspect of the book.

We follow along as their love blooms and they try to deal with the losses within the house and the eventual heartbreak decision they have to make together.

7/10

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## **Claire (Book Blog Bird) says**

This review is also on my blog: [www.bookblogbird.weebly.com](http://www.bookblogbird.weebly.com)

The Death House tells the story of Toby, one of a group of children who has been identified as having the Defective gene after a routine blood test. He now lives at The Death House, an isolated mansion on an island in the North Sea with others like him, where they are studied by Matron and her team of nurses for signs of sickness. If you get sick, you're taken upstairs to the sanatorium. And no one ever comes back from the sanatorium.

First off, I have to say that I did enjoy the Death House. It was a really interesting premise and the plot went into a lot of detail about what would happen with a group of kids, mainly boys, who were lumped together in an isolated house just to wait to get sick and be carted off to an unknown (but presumably grisly) fate.

I really liked Toby. It was good to see a main character with faults (he doesn't pretend to be brave about his fate and he's kind of immature in his attitude to girls) but who also has a lot of excellent qualities. The other characters also have a mixture of good and bad qualities and it was interesting to see how they all dealt with and anticipated their fates.

Matron and her nurses flit in and out like ghosts, barely interacting with the children and leaving them to their own devices for much of the time, which allowed us to see

The problem I had was that I wasn't really sure what the book was trying to do. A creepy, isolated house on an island in the middle of nowhere where children are sent to die has the potential to be super frightening and this book could have been an amazing YA horror story, but most of the story was taken up with Toby and Clara's relationship and the tension and petty squabbles between the dormitories. Don't get me wrong - this was fine and it was still interesting to read, but it wasn't scary or tense, it read more like a high school drama. Going by the cover art (and yes, I do judge a book by its cover) and the blurb, I was expecting some kind of Blair Witch meets Lord of the Flies.

I was also confused about the nature of the Defects the kids were supposed to have. It was alluded to a couple of times that their defective genes would cause them to turn into monsters and that these monsters had somehow nearly brought about an apocalypse before testing for the Defective gene was introduced, but we're never told exactly what happens when the Defective gene matures, or what happened before. I get that mystery keeps it tense and that infodumps are A Bad Thing, but I actually ended up feeling robbed. Instead we got a lot of background into Toby's past with his parents and the girl he used to fancy. This was interesting, but didn't really move the plot along.

A lot of questions remained unanswered at the end. Who was Matron really? What happened to the teachers and nurses? Why, when the Defective gene is identified, are children not just euthanized at The Death House instead of waiting for them to get sick?

Despite this, I still thought The Death House was an interesting story. It just didn't have the Creep Factor I was expecting.

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### **Chinouk Thijssen says**

Niet wat ik verwacht en gehoopt had...

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### **Susan says**

This is a wonderfully creepy and realistic tale about a group of young people who have been isolated on account of being, "defective." Each of the residents of the 'Death House' were randomly tested at school for an unnamed illness, which can strike the population up to the age of eighteen. The main character of this novel, Toby, was not concerned when he took the test at school – indeed most of his classmates were simply relieved to be missing various class tests. However, on returning home, Toby finds that he is being taken away from his family and isolated with the other 'defectives' in a large house, on an unknown island. Contact with the outside is prohibited and, within a short time, the youngsters have almost given up on any hope of visits or letters from home. Instead, life becomes a morning of lessons, given by desultory teachers, who do not seem to see the point of teaching the children, any more than they do of learning; plus a rota of various household tasks and a lot of filling in time.

Toby feels that he has settled into his new life and, as the oldest of his dorm, has a certain status. He spends his time sleeping the days away, avoiding taking the sleeping pills handed out by staff and having the night as his own time. It is in the night that any of the residents of the Death House who develop the illness are taken upstairs to the Sanatorium and never seen again... Into this existence comes a new batch of young people, including Tom and Clara. Up till now, Toby has harboured day dreams about a girl at his old school, but now it is Clara who unsettles him. Rather than accepting her new fate, Clara is cheerful, upbeat and

curious. Gradually, she begins to change Toby's expectations of what his life should mean and how he should live it.

I really enjoyed this novel, finding the characters both sympathetic and believable. The house itself is very evocative, with the lift which swoops down to remove children in the night and the calm, professional staff. Toby himself draws comparisons between his house mates and, "Lord of the Flies," where the children both pounce on weakness and yet search each other for any sign of illness. A great read for a book club, this has much to discuss. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from NetGalley for review.

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### **Liz Barnsley says**

The Death House was a marvel of a read, beautifully emotional, so terribly addictive that I read it in one afternoon and just as a warning, will stomp all over your heart and make it bleed.

Toby lives in "The Death House". Taken from his family having tested positive for the "defective" gene, he spends his days sleeping and his nights wandering. In a place where death seems to be the only possible outcome, Toby has established himself as the leader of his small dorm group, going day to day and waiting for the axe to fall. When a new group of teenagers enter the house however, everything changes as Toby and his companions begin to start living...

I loved the ambience of this one – the kids live the Boarding School life – dormitories, meals, leisure time, lessons – but there is a creepy sense of menace hidden just below the surface. A careful watchfulness that comes across elegantly in the prose – a simple sniff attracting sidelong glances, ever wondering whether the sickness is about to descend and upon whom. There is a formed hierarchy amongst the occupants that ebbs and flows with the days, and for pages you can forget that this is anything other than a coming of age tale, then BAM something hits you right in the gut.

It is all the more intriguing because the threat is so elusive – No-one is clear on what exactly DOES happen to those who end up in the sanatorium, the sickness itself is ambiguous, but the weight of it, the seeming lack of hope, stays with you throughout. There are some very sad moments but there are also some very uplifting ones, reasons to laugh and reasons to cry. The characters are, every single one, outstanding – you will care about what happens to them so much, even the sometimes unlikeable ones. I adored Will and Louis, I even liked Daniel. Jake is magnificent, Toby is captivating, and Clara is so vibrantly alive that you ache for them and the thought that they may not have much time left.

Sarah Pinborough has once again managed to reject that thing which they call genre – everyone reading this gorgeously good story will take something different from it. For me I think it was an all encompassing love story – not just romantic love but Love, in all its forms and with all its sacrifices, pain and joy.

Brilliant. All the stars in the world and a puppy for this one. Have the tissues handy!

Happy Reading Folks!

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### **Amy says**

This was a five star read for me until the very final 6 pages.

Children are taken to the death house after test results show signs of a plague which deteriorate their bodies. The children are fed and given cloths but mostly fend for themselves under the watchful eye of the matron. Toby knows that the nurses give 'vitamins' to the kids at night to make them sleep so when he stops taking them he meets Clara and they become instantly attached to one another. They find a way to escape the confines of the house and discover they are on an isolated island with a beach and shipments come in to bring supplies every month. They plot a way of getting off the island on one of these ships but lose friends to the disease along the way, will they be able to leave those who they now call family behind?

Even though the plot sounds basic I found the whole book very unique. Toby has to deal with a lot, he is the leader of a group of five boys and they haven't had a death in their room since arriving which makes them a target for those who have lost a lot of friends. Toby is isolated until Clara comes along, I like that she brought some feelings back into him because finding out you are sick and watching others die around you must be awful. I loved that he would stay up at night to watch all the nurses take the sick kids to the sanatorium even though that must be terrifying. I loved Will, Louis and Tom, their feelings were described amazingly well by Pinborough.

I did however hate the ending so much it actually hurts. I didn't ever see Toby as a stupid character until the end, what a waste of what an improvement he could have made in the world. He abandoned his friends and even though we are supposed to see him as brave I saw him as the exact opposite, a selfish idiot.

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