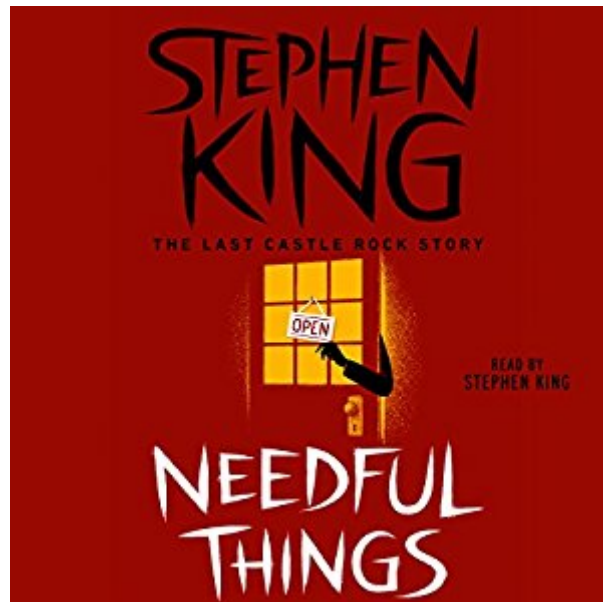


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Needful Things



Synopsis

Stephen King's number-one national best seller about a store where Leland Gaunt can sell you whatever your heart desires - sexual pleasure, wealth, power, or even more precious things - but not without exacting some price in return. Leland Gaunt opens a new shop in Castle Rock called Needful Things. Anyone who enters his store finds the object of his or her lifelong dreams and desires: a prized baseball card, a healing amulet. In addition to a token payment, Gaunt requests that each person perform a little "deed", usually a seemingly innocent prank played on someone else from town. These practical jokes cascade out of control, and soon the entire town is doing battle with itself. Only Sheriff Alan Pangborn suspects that Gaunt is behind the population's increasingly violent behavior. Praised as "tremendous...wonderful...one of King's best" (Kirkus Reviews).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In tradition of 'Salem's Lot, Stephen King writes Needful Things through the view of many characters, not just one main character, and keeps the reader guessing throughout the entire novel what will happen to which character. It works so well in Needful Things that I found myself reading madly and gaping my mouth many times. Truly a gruesome and horrifying experience, in Needful Things, King creates great characters, Alan Pangborn, Norris Ridgewick, Polly Chalmers, Nettie Cobb, Hugh Priest, Ace Merrill, John LaPointe, and maybe the best villain he has ever created in Leland Gaunt. The way he makes Gaunt so low key and friendly, and evil at the same time is wonderful. He also ties in all his other novels which have taken place in Castle Rock such as Cujo,

The Dead Zone, and the novella The Body, very well. Sure, you'll be flipping back to see what character did what to whom when the novel takes its turning points, but that's the fun of it. How King can write so many things in 700 pages and keep the reader hooked and interested. And of course, the ending in which evil does not fully lose. God I love that! Needful Things, one of Stephen King's most entertaining books. A must read!

P>I first reviewed this book several years ago. It was one of the first books by Mr. King that I had read. I loved it. Now that I've had the chance to read much more of his work, what do I think of it now? It's still great. This is one of his best cast of characters assembled here. Alan Pangborn, Norris Ridgewick, Henry Payton, Ace Merrill...everyone is very real-seeming and three-dimensional. But as is often the case in good fiction, the villain steals the show. Leland Gaunt will entrance the reader as much as he did the people of Castle Rock, while simultaneously making you loathe him utterly. This is interesting, because most of King's villains are able to evoke *some* sympathy for the reader; Randall Flagg, IT, and Tak are just a few examples. So what's the difference? Why are those three--among others--capable of being rooted for while Leland Gaunt receives only boos? Randall Flagg, IT, and Tak only want to kill you, and they have semi-indentifiable motives. Gaunt, however, simply wants to be entertained by the carnage and chaos. He'll steal your soul and sow havoc in the same way that you or I would turn on the TV. He'll manipulate whole towns simply for his amusement. Thus it is that King does an excellent job of portraying him as a demon who deserves nothing more than absolute destruction. Overall--still great!

Many of Stephen King's readers (including some of the author's diehard fans) agree that the author's novels lost some of their pizzazz around 1987 or so. Although King's ability to create believable characters has remained strong throughout his career, he seems to have grown tired of the horror themes that inspired his earlier works. Needful Things is a bright spot among the post-Pet Cemetery novels. Despite the formidable length of the book, King's tale of a curio shop that caters to people's innermost desires is captivating from beginning to end. As another reviewer pointed out, the premise of the story is not exactly original--but this doesn't make Needful Things any less entertaining. The story is set in familiar King territory: the small town of Castle Rock, Maine. SK interweaves a number of complex subplots within the dark underside of small town life. Near the climax of the tale, the story switches rapidly from one subplot to another, practically compelling you to turn the page to discover what happens next. Although I liked Needful Things overall, there were a few points that could have been improved:-SK once stated in an interview that he would go for the

gross-out if he couldn't scare the reader outright. (I am loosely paraphrasing a very old interview here.) Many of Stephen King's earlier works contained some genuinely spooky scenes. (Who can forget the woman in the bathtub in *The Shining*?) However, SK's later works tend to rely increasingly on B-movie gore. *Needful Things* contains a few too many descriptions of blood and guts, and a couple of scatological references that could have been omitted. I'm an adult and I've read worse, so these passages don't bother me--but this isn't the kind of writing that King enthralled me with in *Salem's Lot* and *Carrie*. One of the key subplots of the story hinges on a conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants living in Castle Rock. At times, the intensity of the enmity between the two groups seems a bit unrealistic. However, this is a minor flaw in an otherwise well-crafted latticework of back-stories and subplots. If you didn't like *Insomnia* or *Dreamcatcher*, then you should give *Needful Things* a try. You may not like this book as much as *The Shining*, but it stands out among SK's more recent novels.

A simple clever idea neatly executed. If the devil came to your town or city to destroy your community, how would he go about it? This book provides a convincing and entertaining answer to that question. Mr Gaunt is new in town, new yes but he knows the residents only too well, he knows more about them than they know, he understands their pressure points and the price of each of their souls. The cleverness of this book is that it is so believable, the genius of Gaunt's game lies in the differences between human beings, when he sets out to make one person destroy another he plans his moves exquisitely, breaking Wilma's windows seems relatively mild to the boy he selects for the job, yet to Wilma, it is calculated by Gaunt to make her homicidal with rage. Animal rights mean little (morally) to the man he selects to kill Nettie's dog, yet to the lonely, vulnerable and unstable animal lover Nettie, it turns her into a monster. Smaller misdeeds are turned into terrifyingly larger ones with great profit for the Devil Gaunt. Everyone has different values, everyone's endurance limit is different, and so like a row of dominos the town begins to lose its mind.

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