



Hollowstone

Dennis R. Upkins Jr.

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Life for Noah Scott changes drastically when he is accepted to Hollowstone Academy, one of the most prestigious boarding schools in the country set in the mountains of Eastern Tennessee. Within the hallowed halls of the illustrious school, Noah soon discovers that the world of the privileged is rife with social hierarchies, politics, depravity and corruption. It is also there that Noah meets his roommate and best friend, the charming and enigmatic Caleb Warner. Tragedy soon strikes when Cal is brutally murdered in a hold-up. But when Noah is haunted by Cal's ghost, he soon discovers that the random act of violence was in fact a premeditated one. Determined to uncover the truth and find Cal's killer, Noah soon finds that the school and its patrons have more than their share of secrets. Secrets they are willing to preserve at any cost. Through a series of prophetic dreams and visions, Noah also quickly learns that greater supernatural forces are at play. In a race against time, Noah must solve Cal's murder and uncover the truth before he's the killer's next victim."

Hollowstone Details

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From Reader Review *Hollowstone* for online ebook

Amber says

The book is about a Gary Stu trying to solve the murder of another Gary Stu, who manages to upstage everyone with his spectacular violin-playing skills in a *music theory* class.

In an interview I read, the author claimed to treat women characters with respect, but they're nothing more than very offensive caricatures. Brianna is the kind of character only a misogynistic male could come up with, and the treatment of her is just horrifyingly sexist. At one point, the main character "figures" her out (actually, he ~figures out most of the women in the book, because he's just so astute) and the scene is just... I can't even explain. The content of this book is awful.

Originally, I wasn't even going to finish *Hollowstone*. Why? Because it's horribly written. The author does not use commas (except to make comma splices) and the novel's voice is incredibly wooden. I think you can find excerpts of the novel via Amazon and on the author's blog, so check them out first if you're considering purchasing *Hollowstone*. Not everyone can withstand constant butchery of the English language, and less people are willing to pay for it.

ETA (4 September 2011)

I decided to do a more detailed review, since some of the author's friends have decided that all the book's detractors don't have legitimate complaints -- that they just hate Upkins. Here are my issues with the novel...

-Saying that *Hollowstone* needs "some" editing is a massive understatement. Whether we're talking about form or content, the book feels as if no one besides the author bothered to read the manuscript before publication. For example, Upkins' prose violates basic grammar rules, particularly when it comes to punctuation. Commas appear only to create comma splices, and dialogue often sounds stilted and awkward because sentences are not properly broken up. (Speaking of dialogue, all the characters sound the same, too.)

Additionally, there are severe vocabulary issues in *Hollowstone*. Cal, the protagonist's best friend, says: "Finally, I get to fellowship with fellow writers, my brethren." Well... fellowship is not a verb. Noah, whose perspective the story is told from, mentions that an alum donated a lot of money "...to the school in the subversive hopes of having a building named after him." Here, it's obvious that subversive doesn't mean what he thinks it means. These are just a couple examples of words being used incorrectly, but it's a persistent problem in the text.

Re: content, there are a lot of scenes that, in my opinion, an editor would've elected to cut in order for *Hollowstone* to feel more like a Young Adult book. Characters that we're supposed to like—such as Nolan, the music teacher, and Caleb—say really heinously inappropriate things about women on multiple occasions. I'll get to some specific examples later.

-The novel is very poorly researched. In *Hollowstone*, *The Art of War* is by "Shang" Tzu (when in fact the author is Sun Tzu). Noah plays the violin in a music theory class, and "saws" away at his instrument. Neely (the only non-heterosexual woman in the text, who ends up being Noah's cheerleader and has no life of her own) does some research on the protagonist's behalf, and the supernatural elements of the novel are lazily explained. Neely tells Noah re: the school's location: "This place is a hodge podge of demonic energy. After the European settlers arrived, many warlocks met here and practiced the dark arts in secret. The warlocks

went underground when the Salem Witch Trials hit but that doesn't mean there still isn't a supernatural presence here." The Salem Witch Trials predate any permanent settlements and Westward expansion by... well, a lot of years, and if Upkins had done his research he could have easily found a better explanation for the existence of demonic energy or whatever. The "official" reason does not make sense at all.

-So many scenes in Hollowstone are awkward to the point of causing secondhand embarrassment. One example that sticks out for me is when Noah and Caleb go to an open mic event, and the latter performs a poem. Upkins' includes the entirety of it in the text. For the record, the poem's around 350 words and takes up two pages on this Microsoft Word document. We're also supposed to think the poem is great, but in reality it's very bad. For example, one stanza reads: "A small kiss / A kiss that triggered all of this / A kiss that sent him spiraling / A kiss that brought reason to Faust's plight / For such a token could easily launch a thousand ships." A stanza that's repeated multiple times goes like this: "He dances to surrender / He dances to forget / He dances to find the symmetry, / He dances to numb / He dances to mend / He dances for it to end." Yep. Less severe secondhand comes from the very dated way in which Upkins' characterizes cliques—there are only two in the school, apparently, and it's the standard (and this point old) "dumb jocks" versus smart nerds thing.

-Since the author spends a great deal of time promoting himself in progressive online spaces (especially ones for LGBT individuals), I've not only been personally recommended Hollowstone, but I've also had to see this offensive train wreck pop up on websites made for feminists, lesbians/bisexual women, the LGBT community, etc. I thus believe it's worth mentioning that the novel really fails at tackling issues of inclusion. While some good points are made about race and class, Upkins is incapable of being subtle—and class issues are especially heavy-handed and ham-fisted. I've lived being a poor person in a much wealthier school system, and while high school students are cruel, in my experience they don't begin to rival the incredibly exaggerated version of class entitlement that Upkins depicts.

Women and non-heterosexual youths (there are no lesbians, nor or there any trans* young adults) are handled incredibly poorly. Caleb is pretty nasty and objectifies female characters constantly, lecherously describing certain women (like Brianna) only by their looks and level of promiscuity. By the way, this is how he treats women he has no issues with. When it comes to women Cal doesn't like, he shames their sexuality and either accuses them of being "skanks" (his proof: they slept with him) or of having STDs. Nolan, the music teacher, tells a female students to swallow her gum in the same way that she swallows for the football team. These are just a few examples.

I'm not sure why I've been recommended to read this as Gay or LGBT YA. Noah is straight, and the two bisexual characters (Cal and Neely) are only depicted as being in opposite-sex relationships, if they're in relationships at all. The gay subplot, which involved two minor characters, is very melodramatic and offensive. Spoilers ahead, but one character who is perceived as gay (and is in fact gay) is constantly bullied. His boyfriend, who's on the football team, comes out in order to help prevent some of the bullying. Things don't go the way he anticipated and one's left for the dead and the other decides he's going to shoot up the school (until the straight hero tackles him). When Upkins has talked about their scenes in interviews, he's made it a point to say how they're not "effeminate" gay men (implying that bullying and violence are OK in that context?) and how people should be more mindful of bullying because sometimes "LGBTQs," as he calls us, fight back. (So, school shootings are justified? What?)

In conclusion, anyone saying this book is horrible and misogynistic and poorly researched and horribly edited... they're ALL right.

Calimie says

I'll be honest. I haven't read the complete book, but I read enough excerpts to know it's so misogynist I don't care to know more.

Edited: to fix spelling.

Michele Harrod says

I actually enjoyed this book. I would say it's target market is teenage boys, as the dialogue is pure "teen boy fantasy" in places, but teen boys amuse me, so I found it quite entertaining. I didn't take any of the chauvanist comments personally, so was not offended as I can see many readers have been. Maybe because I am not an LGBGTY or whatever the code is? It certainly had some good twists, and repulsive rich-kid bad guys to loathe. I particularly liked the wrap-up and closure for all the characters, something that is often lacking in good fiction or TV series. This would be a great tween TV mini-series, with an "upgrade" of the dialogue. Takes a surprising turn with the arrival of a helpful 'angel'. Unexpected, but fun.

One note to the author, drug is not an alternative word for dragged. "Drug" is something taken to get better, or high. Dragged, is when you are being taken across the floor, either under your own volition, dragging you legs behind you, or by someone else, usually being lifted under your armpits. Please get that right in future!! Since most of the kids in the novel had a penchant for drugs, it flowed badly using the word incorrectly.

Ken Rohms says

Very good book. Definitely worth checking out.

Squidgy says

Oh my. How to describe Hollowstone?

Upkins' achieves something incredible with his first novel. There may not be a single piece of dialogue in this book that wasn't stolen from an excitable movie poster tag line, yet Upkins' craft makes Hollowstone the perfect monotonous stand-in for when your wave machine has broken. Armed with sage advice not to overdo it on the dialogue tags, Upkins' is still keenly aware his readers will forget what quotation marks are for and sticks in ten or twelve "He said"'s to a page. Lesser authors might adhere to outdated rules like 'Don't write pages of your crappy adolescent poetry and have everyone act like it's the lost quarto of Shakespeare,' but Hollowstone is three sheets to the wind with that. When the author finds the perfect word to complete a sentence, he then uses it four or five times more in the same paragraph.

I was planning to do a serious review, but frankly I've wasted enough of my time reading this embarrassing dreck. Noah Scott is the id-fueled stand-in for the author. Without any flaws or failings, he makes no

impression on any of the stories going on around him. He's hated by the evil characters (the preps and the jocks) admired and loved by the good characters (sociopaths, abusive school teachers, bisexual wiccans, mobsters). If they aren't stereotypes enough, there's also some evil right-wing politicians, slutty schoolgirls and gay kids having nervous breakdowns and holding hostages at gunpoint. There are moments when Hollowstone almost breaks free of it's cliché, but the plot bogs itself down by trying to be too many things at once.

To compound its sins, this deadly dull novel is over £5 for an ebook. Give it definite miss.

LightandMan says

Such a shame.

I had this book recommended to me as a good example of a non-white protagonist, so I had high hopes. I don't know what went wrong, but I am shocked to see that a book of this quality was put out by an e-pub, and not self-published. There were numerous grammar errors within the first fifty pages (all I could stomach). There are entire sections -- nearly four pages at one point -- which is pure back and forth conversation: no dialogue tags, no actions from either character to break it up, just straight talk. And this was to introduce one of the main characters!

Although this book was written in first person POV, the reader is rarely allowed access to the protagonist's inner thoughts. This is accomplished by way of long, long, (agonizingly long) dialogue blocks. There is little room for character reactions, leaving everything implied by speech. This does not make for a riveting read. For example in the prologue the protag sees his friend's ghost at his funeral. This treated with such blasé non-reaction that I wondered if the character commonly saw ghosts. Maybe he does, but it wasn't mentioned again in the first 50 pages so I doubt it.

Where the writing wasn't flat, it was ugly. There was one point where the protagonist's friend casually refers to two girls he had in a hot tub recently as "skanks". Literally the next line, the protagonist laughs and then mentions he hates being profiled (for the color of his skin). So racism = bad, but profiling women for daring to have sex = a'okay? This was presented without a hint of irony, by the way. I can tell the difference between an unreliable narrator, and, frankly troubling writing.

Again, I was only able manage to slog through part of the book. The bad guys (basically everyone but the protag, one bullied boy, his roommate and his girlfriend) are... almost cartoonishly evil. It's as if they all universally rolled out of bed thinking, "How can I be the most despicable, evil incarnation of a human being that I can today?" This is done, presumably, while twirling their Snidely Whiplash mustaches.

There ARE glimmers of brilliance in here. They are few and far between, and usually weighed down by clunky writing, but they are there! The music teacher is amusing in a good Snape-ish way (although I've never been to a music theory class where you actually preformed and not, y'know, studied music theory). The California valley girl made me cringe with the awful dialogue and 'like' every sentence, but she was at least burst of a colorful personality in an school full of blahs. The supernatural elements and the non-white protagonist got me excited for the book, and should have made for a refreshing change.

This book is in dire need of a tough editor and industrial-grade polish. Again, it's such a shame. It's a novel full of 'should have been'.

Sean says

Hollowstone is Upkins' first novel, I've been a fan of his net.writing for some time now, so I was very eager to read this. I even bought it in Kindle edition because it wasn't available in Google Books (my preferred e-reader). But that's not his fault.

Hollowstone is told from the point of view of a young African-American boy who gets a music scholarship to attend the prestigious boarding school after which the book is named. The protagonist's roommate is the resident bad-boy. The school is rife with politics and intrigue that turns serious and deadly.

Upkins did an impressive job with the structure of the book, and the pacing is very well handled. The language is a bit rough in places, but I'm looking forward to a second novel - he has the bones of a damn good story, and a few blemishes on its skin, and those are the kinds of things that can be worked out with practice.

Gement says

I picked it up for the protagonist and I finished it for the murder mystery.

I enjoyed spending 200 pages with the main character, even when I wanted to smack him a few times. I enjoyed watching all the dirty pool of a private school explode in slow motion. There was some very satisfying wish fulfillment of actually getting to tell the jerks what they've done to you and have some of them *listen.* It also captured how people get bone-tired and angry after hearing the same bigoted garbage a million times, which can be hard to understand if you haven't been on the receiving end.

Maybe best of all, everyone had baggage. By the end of the book, if I'm counting right, every school-age character and some of the adults had known struggles that clearly informed their behavior. Even if they were still awful people, it wasn't in a vacuum. Most of us are hurting one way or another, and a lot of YA books pass that by.

The book deserved a much better copy editor. I had to take off one star because there were enough missing commas, homophones, and just awkward sentences that it threw me out of the story frequently. Different people have different sensitivities, though. If I'd read this at 13, I'd have gobbled it up and never noticed.

Maru Maru says

SPOILERS AHEAD

I have two main issues with this book's plot (besides the author's virulent misogyny, but I've spoken enough about that in my own Tumblr, so I'll keep this review book-specific)

First, why is this book being promoted as being LGBTQ-friendly? The main character is straight and the white bisexual 'protagonist' is paired up with a guy five seconds after appearing, not that she even appears enough

to be considered a main character. This book isn't LGBTQ-friendly, and it's certainly not women-friendly either.

Second, the author claims that rape is handled respectfully and realistically—as a rape survivor I can say that no, it isn't. Caleb (the protagonist's friend who calls women skanks and accuses them of having STDs) finds out his dad raped his mother and that because he was wealthy and she wasn't, she couldn't do anything about it. Caleb is the product of rape, and considering the author's own stance on abortions due to rape, this is an incredibly offensive portrayal that smacks of author soapboxing.

Grossly simplifying rape culture in this context is not appropriate, it's offensive. In *Hollowstone*, rape/rape culture is used to add to Cal's bad/troubled past and his angst, like the plot line of a soap opera, without deconstructing it/condemning it.

As the author has, suggesting that *Hollowstone* speaks against rape culture is laughable and disingenuous. Just because the characters in the novel are not overtly pro-rape/rape apologists doesn't mean they're not enabling rape culture by cracking jokes about women characters swallowing and calling them skanks.

The characters in *Hollowstone* enable rape culture with their misogyny, and as a rape survivor, I'm offended by how this book handles rape.

Why the author continues to state that this book is inclusive and progressive, from a marginalized point of view, I have no idea, but it's simply not true.

Rachel says

a summary of my feelings on this awful excuse of a novel:

Laura says

It's quite thrilling to see a debut book released when you've seen from the very beginning how it started, the writing process and the continual stages of shipping out to publishers etc and to finally see the end product makes you feel all gooey and warm inside. I felt like this book had a lot to live up to for me because I've known the author for some years and followed his online writing even before *Hollowstone* was created and had a certain amount of good hopes that this would live up to my self-imposed hype. I hate putting things on a pedestal even before I have them in my hands but all I can say is it's like the cliché of judging a book by its cover; cliché are there because they are generally true so I get excited by a book and have to de-hype it in my head so I can give it a fair chance to be judged and enjoyed.

Set in the foreboding halls of *Hollowstone Academy*, Noah starts a new school year after getting a music scholarship out of his state education and into one of the most elite schools in the country. Noah has had a hard life fitting social judgement and losing both his parents in the Hurricane Katrina tragedy and still maintaining good grades and being a violin prodigy even though most would assume he's a jock or just someone that got lucky to get into the school. Noah is a highly intelligent guy and he uses his brain before

jumping into fights and going against the grain even more he is a dedicated church goer and doesn't jump into bed with every pretty thing going. He's by no means average and so his placement at Hollowstone and sharing a room with Cal, class rebel and party man legend, isn't going to make his life much quieter.

Full Review: <http://sisterspookybookfangirl.blogspot...>

Mari Stroud says

I was aware of this author's reputation for particularly virulent misogyny in the blogosphere and was very nervous in reading this book. Was that nervousness justified? Well...yes and no. Yep, every single woman or girl in this book is a stereotype. However, *none* of the characterizations are particularly deep, even those of the author-insert narrator. (You want to make an author insert interesting and able to fly under the radar as such, at least be self-aware enough to include your flaws.) It's less sexist and more...just a bad book. The prose is awkward, the ultimate conflict is outlandish, and I think that it was copy-edited by a drunk. ("Spared" and "speared" do not mean the same thing. Neither do "of course" and "of coarse", among so many other things. I should also note that, no matter how much the author wants to make points about various privileges, judges do not get to overturn jury verdicts in murder trials for funsies.) Hollowstone tries at various points to be a ghost story, a Southern Gothic, a crime thriller, and a social commentary, but it ultimately succeeds at none of these things.

Leisa says

Quite possibly the most intriguing book I have read in a very long time. I have read a lot of YA books that are set at Boarding Schools, and I thought "ho hum, here's another one", but it wasn't at all what it seemed on the surface. Noah is not a completely reliable narrator, and he sees the world with too much compassion and grace, even as bad things happen and his world falls apart. Even when the story seems to be just about a young kid who survived Hurricane Katrina and lucked into a scholarship at a prestigious school, there is always a chilling element of "things are not what they seem" embedded into the narration. I wish Abby and Neely had been better developed (especially Neely-what a missed opportunity!).

Although the book stumbles in a few places (more to editing issues than story), this does not distract from a good story.

John Egbert says

This book sounded decent...I found it marked on my friend's shelves as "would-rather-eat-my-own-vomit-than-read" and "never-will-I-ever" and wondered why. I researched it...and I found out rather quickly.

No thanks. Not even for the lulz.

(EDIT: And may I add something else about this book? THE COVER SUCKS. I mean, really? Yellow font over, what is that, bronze? Seriously, dude? And that font. THAT. FONT. It's terrible. It doesn't even match the rest of the cover for god's sake. AND THE LIGHTNING LOOKS SO CHEESY. My inner designer screams in agony.

That is all.)

Ashur says

FULL DISCLOSURE: Given the hype and my familiarity with it, I'm going to be somewhat specific in my thoughts on *Hollowstone*. Those unfamiliar with my personal rating system (why WOULD you be familiar with my rating system?) know that I tend to rate everything lower rather than higher; 2 stars literally means what the mouse-over says, "it was okay".

While I enjoyed it, I think I could've enjoyed it more had it benefited from more editing. I guess I had higher expectations in that regard. While there's something to be said for a quick pace, it largely felt too fast and I felt the plot could've used some more fleshing out to prevent it from feeling disjointed. While I typically knew what was going on, there were a couple of times where I became confused. Perhaps that speaks more to my own cognitive abilities.

I did find the much of the dialogue amusing ("nonplussed about the Emancipation Proclamation") and easy to envision the characters speaking in my head.

Overall, *Hollowstone* feels unpolished. I genuinely think more thorough editing prior to release would've improved it, as well as being thicker. However, it's also a first novel and I'm not expecting perfection. I will continue to pay attention to Upkins' future works.

EDIT: At the time I read *Hollowstone*, I hadn't read *The Great Gatsby*, which Upkins intentionally integrated themes from into *Hollowstone*. I completed *Gatsby* immediately after *Hollowstone* and it changed my perception of some characters, as well as allowing me to get some references I hadn't previously noticed. Lots of little "ah ha!" moments. I encourage readers who aren't familiar with *Gatsby* and who are interested in *Hollowstone* to read *Gatsby* first.
