



Small Spaces

Sarah Epstein

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We don't pick and choose what to be afraid of. Our fears pick us.

Tash Carmody has been traumatised since childhood, when she witnessed her gruesome imaginary friend Sparrow lure young Mallory Fisher away from a carnival. At the time nobody believed Tash, and she has since come to accept that Sparrow wasn't real. Now fifteen and mute, Mallory's never spoken about the week she went missing.

As disturbing memories resurface, Tash starts to see Sparrow again. And she realises Mallory is the key to unlocking the truth about a dark secret connecting them. Does Sparrow exist after all? Or is Tash more dangerous to others than she thinks?

Small Spaces is a gripping young adult thriller from debut Australian author Sarah Epstein, perfect for 14+ fans of Fleur Ferris and Rebecca James. Read more about the author and her novel at www.sarahepsteinbooks.com

“A beautifully crafted psychological thriller. I couldn’t put it down.” Fleur Ferris

“This gripping debut messes with your head and makes you doubt your own senses. Sarah Epstein smashes it out of the park.” Ellie Marney

“A deliciously creepy YA thriller that reeled me in, made my heart race and kept me guessing to the very end.” Rachael Craw

Small Spaces Details

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From Reader Review Small Spaces for online ebook

C.G. Drews says

Okay and WOW this one definitely glued my entire face to the page. It's seriously one of those thrillers were I was like, "Eh I'll read a few chapters before working on stuff" and then it's like an hour later and I'm flipping pages anxiously after shouting at the sun a bit and checking under my bed 57 times and saying, "whAt iS GoING ONNNN."

Solid stuff here. Am a fan.

Also two things to note: (1) I CAN'T check under my bed because my bed is on the floor?!??!!? So look what this book has done to me. And (2) I don't actually usually like thrillers [I'm never thrilled] but I enjoyed this one so so much so I'm just happy ahh!

I think what made this one stand out (for me) is how amazingly it built the characters. So I wasn't just here for the creepy plot...but also for these characters who were complex and diverse and dimensional and LEFT ME FEELING THINGS. Tash is an anxious wreck. Morgan is like an over-excited puppy of love. Sadie is here to be so fabulous you can see her glorious light shining from the moons. Mallory is just soft™ and must be protected at all costs. **I!! love!! them!!** Books that focus on characters first ALWAYS make me care over anything [waves hands vaguely] that the plot is doing.

However. This also had a frikkin' fine plot. Basically it's about Tash, now 17, still trying to recover from her traumatic childhood where she (a) had a psycho imaginary friend named Sparrow WHO WAS LIKE AN EVIL Splot YOU'D FIND IN THE BASEMENT, and (b) she witnessed a 6 year old little girl get kidnapped. But obviously when an 8-year-old says "My imaginary friend kidnapped her!" everyone just writes her off as an attention-seeking brat.

My heart really broke for Tash and the way her mental health was treated. I loved how it was handled, but it was also infuriating?!? Like her mother is AWFUL. Tash is obviously mentally ill, even now at 17, but everyone still just says she's attention seeking! And I think that happens far too much IRL so it's a wicked punch right there.

I also liked the questions of of: is the imaginary friend real or not?!? Because it keeps you wondering if this is secretly paranormal, or does Tash have a serious mental illness, or is something else going on?? OBVIOUSLY I GIVE NO SPOILERS. But Sparrow was so *flipping creepy*. I was genuinely CREEPED. If I say "creep" one more time you can creep over and turn me into a crepe or something. I mean.

#CREEPIIFIED

I think the whole plot tied together reeeeeally well at the end. Yeeah maybe a little "tight and clean" and MAYBE I'm sitting here pouting about a sequel, because I'd love to see this friendship gang progressing. Adorable messed up damaged little boxes of trauma they are!

My only quibble is that it was very long. Jk jk I'm sure most people wouldn't care, but it felt slow at the beginning (probably to build tension??) and I would've liked to move along faster. And obviously Tash made a LOT of frustrating decisions. ("Hey I'm going to spend the weekend at my aunt who I haven't seen in forever's house even though lol lol remember when I was 8 and staying here and was so traumatised!!")

TASH. WHERE IS YOUR GOD GIVEN BRAIN.) And it was so frustrating seeing Tash's mental health scorned, but that *was* the point. I just arghhhh. That's not even a negative. I don't know what I'm saying. I'm a mESS just go.

So basically one of my new favourite thrillers. I mean! I was actually thrilled and the writing was A+ and the characters stole the show and also all of them need help. And like, a warm pretzel or something. But help. (Ohh help.) And the whole idea of your childhood imaginary friend being SUPER CREEPY is just amazing. I'm glad I never had one now, even though my inability to make fake friends or real friends is remarkable. Wow, score @ me.

Kelly (Diva Booknerd) says

The New South Wales coastal town of Port Bellamy is synonymous with Mallory Fisher, abducted from the promenade carnival and discovered wandering the surrounding forest physically unharmed. Natasha Carmody wandered the carnival alone, visiting the small rural community as her brother was welcomed into the world. Child psychiatrist Ingrid Ballantine believes Sparrow is a manifestation of isolation, a fabrication created by a child displaced by a sibling. Natasha has endured the degradation and resentment of her mother, a woman disengaging with her daughter over the fabricated account. Detectives interviewed Natasha Carmody who was present the day Mallory was abducted by Sparrow, a nondescript shadow disregarded as a suspect.

Natasha Carmody is a photography enthusiast, a conscientious young woman and diligent daughter. Sparrow is a constant and menacing presence, a figure cloaked in shadows believed to be the vivid imaginings of a narcissistic child. It began at Willow Creek, the derelict childhood home of her father. Sparrow would enter through the bedroom window, coercing eight year old Natasha into dangerous predicaments for his own amusement and gratification. His manipulation culminating with the disappearance of Mallory. Although Sparrow engages in predatory behaviour, cruelty and manipulation, he is not a sexual predator.

Mallory now communicates through non verbal cues, diagnosed with selective mutism, her recollection of her ordeal unable to assist the authorities. Mallory experiences anxiety, preferring the sanctuary of her bedroom and online friendships. Morgan Fisher was present at the carnival when Mallory disappeared, accepting culpability for her abduction. Morgan is an interesting character, although self condemning his positivity is infectious. His tentative friendship with Natasha is sincere and compassionate, although Morgan unsuspects Natasha's involvement in the abduction investigation.

Although Natasha concedes that Sparrow is a manifestation, she is an unreliable protagonist. The nonlinear narrative blends present tense with the childhood psychiatric transcripts succeeding the abduction. Natasha now experiences social anxiety, apprehensive of forming new friendships. Her friendship with Sadie is wonderful, a young M?ori woman identifying as lesbian, her single mother operating a small catering business is inspirational.

Another extraordinary aspect is Sarah Epstein's ingenuity to create an atmospheric environment, as a bystander encompassed by the narrative, menacing and foreboding. Small Spaces is a compelling, unpredictable and consuming debut. Phenomenal.

Tamsien West (Babbling Books) says

A dark, twisted YA thriller that definitely lived up to the creepy hype. The book was pitched by the author at an event I attended with something like "As a child Tash had a gruesome imaginary friend, years later Sparrow is back to finish their game..." and that was all I needed to be hooked.

I really enjoyed the structure of the book, with flashbacks in the form of transcripts from psychologist appointments that Tash had when she was a child, after the traumatic experience she had when another little girl was kidnapped in front of her.

I'm always really excited to see authors of YA exploring different genres beyond the contemporary/fantasy/scifi triangle, and Small Spaces sits well alongside all of Fleur Ferris's YA Thrillers in paving the way for teens to become readers of crime and thrillers.

Nomes says

If you're looking for a book to just relax with and read a few chapters before bed, this is not that book. Small Spaces is twisty, intriguing and creepy, and once you start you won't want to put it down. This psychological suspense thriller is a debut so I'm really excited to see what Sarah Epstein has coming up ~ a must read for fans of the genre.

Paulette says

Great debut book book Sarah. Really enjoyable creepy read.
Highly recommend grabbing this one

Craig Hildebrand says

It's often difficult to accurately recall just how subjective teenage experience can be. We all like to think we grow up with increasing sense of awareness about ourselves, about our place in the world and the people have around us. But so much of childhood is constructed out of fractured, distorted memories, formed not just by our own attempts to grapple with our own story, but also by the conscious and unconscious influences of friends, peers and family.

And we can lose sight of this when dealing with teenagers, particularly those like Tash Carmody, the protagonist of Sarah Epstein's Small Spaces – a teenager on the absolute precipice of adulthood.

They may be a breath away from adulthood, but teenagers are still children. It's easy to forget.

Despite Tash making plans for university and juggling assessments in her final year of school, Epstein shows us just how much she is in need of adult support. And not just support, but recognition. Someone to just listen to her.

Having possibly witnessed a traumatic event as an 8-year-old, Tash is still struggling nine years later. Chapters in her present, final year of school are woven into transcripts of her sessions with a psychiatrist when she was younger, and Epstein invites us to chart a path from the scared and confused small child to the traumatised young adult.

In this way, with its parallel points of view, *Small Spaces* evokes the structure and tension of *Gone Girl*. We are given parallel timelines, with connective tissue, but we slowly begin to realise that the early timeline may not line up perfectly with the current timeline. Tash's current point of view may not be one the reader can entirely trust. Events occur without explanation; memories and imaginings coincide and coalesce until even she acknowledges that she may not be the best guide to what is occurring in her life.

It is here that *Small Spaces* works so wonderfully: the conflict is not between duelling characters' control of the story as it is in *Gone Girl*, but in the duelling thoughts in Tash's head. Rather than guessing which character is going to come out on top, we read on, terrified that Tash's own sense of self, her own wellbeing, will not survive the conflicts with her past.

And this is because on the surface, *Small Spaces* is a thriller about the past coming back to haunt the present. But underneath that, this is much more a story about one person's attempt to navigate and survive childhood trauma. And Tash has to do it all alone. Her parents are either too busy or too exhausted to deal with the ongoing difficulties Tash has, particularly as now she should be old enough and responsible enough to deal with life. And despite a supportive best friend and a growing reconnection with an old friend, Tash is increasingly isolated from everyone in *Small Spaces*, except her conflicting thoughts. And her childhood imaginary friend.

The scenes of Tash's memories are written with wonderfully spare and haunting descriptions, giving the reader not only a clear look at how disturbed the 8-year-old Tash was by visits from this childhood spectre, but also leaving us thoroughly disturbed as well. Tash is uncertain how much of this is fantasy, how much is dream, and how much is a reconstruction of something that might have happened. And if she doesn't know, then the reader is too, jettisoned from any sense of control or comfort. Reality teeters on the edge, and then falls. Rather than the reader gaining a stronger sense of Tash's struggles as the novel progresses, the growing divide between her memories and her actions shock the reader with how much their point of view in the story is unravelling, how little control Tash has over her story.

Small Spaces is a frightening, tense portrait of teenage trauma, where the only possible comfort is recognising trauma in others.

Rachael says

safe part of the review with no spoilers

What a ripper debut. I am not exaggerating when I say this book made my heart pound. The suspense was excellent. It kept me guessing all the way to the reveal. Sarah Epstein made me totally paranoid, I couldn't trust any of the characters! I read this over several nights. Nights, people! And it had me checking shadows in the hall on the way to the loo. Hells bells!

Also: the writing is beautiful. I am mad keen on a delicious metaphor or a smartly turned phrase and there were so many moments where I paused to re-read a delicious line.

Small Spaces has saved me from my reading slump!

spoilers ahead

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I have to say my favourite parts were the moments with Sparrow, seen through Tash's childhood memories. The details in these exchanges were exquisitely creepy! That first sighting on the box seat and my FAV when she finds him on the veranda in the night. GOOSEBUMPS AHOY!

Also: it taps into one of my unbearable feelings: not being believed. There's something profoundly enraging about it and I think it's connected to the sense of injustice and powerlessness which is all basically unbearable.

Lots of GREAT omg turn back (!!!) don't go in there moments! Like staying in the house ALONE, visiting an abandoned amusement park *Evidence of Epstein Evil* endless wandering by herself.

MASSIVE SPOILERS

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Being a major fan of other-worldly creepers and spooks and weirdness and speculative elements I would have happily swallowed the notion of Sparrow being a manifestation of evil or a projection of Tash's darkness or a demon that required exorcising: BRING ON THE CHANTING AND CRUCIFIXES. However, I was just as invested in this realistic reveal. Even once I knew what was what I was all adrenaline page turning and holding my breath to the end. It is alarming how fittingly demon-like this story proves to be.

Bookread2day says

This brilliant thriller is aimed at 14 year olds + but I recommend it to adults too. I would like to thank walker books for sending me Small Spaces paperback to review.

My full review www.bookread2day.wordpress.com

Jeann (Happy Indulgence) says

Trigger warnings: child abuse, drug use, animal cruelty, mental illness

A fantastic, deliciously creepy read from an unreliable narrator who is being haunted by her childhood imaginary friend. The mystery constantly kept me guessing and I loved the psychologist reports from the past being interchanged with the present, as Tash learns to navigate the traumatic thoughts of her past.

As I was reading, you were constantly thinking - is she mentally ill? Is she just seeing things? Is her imaginary friend Sparrow actually real? The writing just flowed, leaving enough to keep us guessing about the plot and whether the disturbing circumstances she was facing was truth or fiction.

Full review on Happy Indulgence Books.

Figgy says

RTC.

A Melbourne author's debut novel about not being able to trust your own mind, and wondering whether it was yourself or your imaginary friend who perpetrated bad acts? Yes, please!

So many times while reading this book, I wondered where the author had been lurking when she recorded my childhood, what with the hunting for tadpoles, the strained maternal relationship, and constantly finding things moving in the shadows.

At times I found it easy to get distracted and put the story down (mostly in the "now" chapters; I was never able to stop reading the "then" chapters), but at other times I would tear through 100 pages in a sitting. Overall I don't think I was completely shocked or scared by the events depicted, which was kinda what I was hoping for, but it did teeter on the verge of creepy several times.

I did guess a decent chunk of the twist/ending from fairly early on, but in a "it could be this thing... or it could be THIS thing..." way, so I wasn't like "oh, yeah, that's definitely what's going on" and it did keep me guessing throughout most of the book.

It's just a shame the pacing was a little off; it didn't feel like there was a whole lot of character development for anyone outside of Tash; and there were quite a few times where the reader easily picked up on things and Tash seemed to have, but they were repeated... just to make sure the reader was up to speed. For switched-on readers, this could be rather annoying.

Alice-Elizabeth (marriedtobooks) says

For anyone living outside of Australia, the easiest way to get a copy is through Book Depository!: <https://www.bookdepository.com/Small-...>

HOLY HECK, ASJGKSJAJWK. No seriously, what just happened? Like, those last 30 or so pages were just... plot twisty so cue more ASJGKSJAJWK. Small Spaces is an outstanding YA debut psychological thriller that kept me hooked. I had lessons most of the day today but honestly, this book kept calling me. I FLIPPING LOVED IT!

OK, so Small Spaces follows our main character Tash, a young seventeen year old girl who as a child, witnessed a young girl called Mallory Fisher being abducted from a carnival. She calls the man who abducts her Sparrow but over time, she is forced into believing that Sparrow is an imaginary person and not a scary, violent man. When the Fisher family moves back to the town from Queensland, Tash learns that Mallory is mute and won't speak verbally to anyone, rather text or draw as a form of communication. She once again connects with Mallory's brother who becomes friendly towards her. Tash struggles with her mental health and after rumours start getting spread, a chance to spend time with her estranged Aunt Ally may give her the break that she needs. Except, that break isn't a relaxing one...

What can I say? This psychological thriller was brilliantly written, the suspense and experiences between Tash and this Sparrow were creepy but made me want to read on. The dialogue kept my interest but please someone make this into a film, I would watch it in a heartbeat! Spooky, thrilling and overall, an excellent read. This is a book YOU MUST ADD TO YOUR TBR PEEPS! PS: I support Love Oz YA and if you are new to reading YA Fiction set in Australia, this is a great book to start with!

Whispering Stories says

Book Reviewed by Cara on www.whisperingstories.com

Natasha Carmody is trying to live a normal teenage life, but due to dark childhood secrets, she is starting to confuse reality with imagination.

When the Fisher family move back into town, all those thoughts and fears she had tried to forget in the last ten years come flooding back along with Sparrow, the imaginary friend she watched lure six-year-old Mallory Fisher away. Determined to find out what really happened all those years ago, Natasha befriends the family and tries to piece together a childhood nightmare that just won't go away.

Small Spaces is a well written, easy to read novel that has you guessing throughout. The main character suffers psychological problems which brings on paranoia and so whilst reading you find yourself suspecting everyone and trusting no one. I found myself caring for the main character and getting frustrated with people who were mistreating her. I was very satisfied with the ending and felt no stone had been left unturned.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading Small Spaces and found it difficult to put down. I am looking forward to any future books the author may release.

Wing-yee (bibliomeds) says

3.5/4 stars.

i'm always up for a good old Aussie YA thriller! this one was pretty good! I kind of guessed most of the plot oops - but I still enjoyed the thrill and suspense :))

~~though the MC really annoyed me at times~~

Ruby Granger says

'Small Spaces' is a YA psychological thriller set in the bush of Australia and following the life of Natasha Carmody (17/18). After the disappearance of Mallory Fisher at a carnival ten years ago, Tash was psychologically broken, convinced that she had seen her imaginary friend Sparrow kidnap the six-year-old. With her claims dismissed as attention-seeking, Tash, still convinced that what she saw was real, is forced to accept that she made it all up. But now, a decade later, she keeps on catching glimpses of Sparrow and doesn't know how to interpret these new experiences or those of her childhood.

I've got to admit that the first forty pages of this novel are not massively fast pace and, at the beginning, I was tempted to just set the book down for good... but I am so glad that I did not because 'Small Spaces' quickly becomes just the opposite of slow-pace. Epstein shows Tash's attempts to unpick the mystery of Mallory's earlier disappearance and understand her own role in the kidnapping. The unexpected turns mean that the novel is predominately plot-driven; however, there are also some wonderful descriptions and the characters are three-dimensional and believable (even the 'mean girl' Rachael).

I would definitely recommend this book if you are looking for a light but intense summer read!

Neil (or bleed) says

Actual rating: 3.5 stars
