

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

MICHAEL SHAPMIRE

Peter Tallon

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BOOK REVIEW

Tallon's fifth novel is an old-school gothic horror tale of faith mediating the age-old struggle between good and evil.

When the reader first meets Inigo Boscabel, the year is 1995, and he's just left seminary after abandoning a decadelong attempt at becoming a Jesuit priest. His somewhat inexplicable crisis of faith has left him floundering, so he embarks on a three-day hike in the rugged countryside of Suffolk, England, with a 220-pound English mastiff named Wellington. But a sprained ankle forces him to accept help and shelter from kindly doctor Lucas Fairweather in the isolated village of Hobbswood. Warned to avoid the house of Michael Shapmire, a man who "seems to cast a dark shadow over [the villagers'] lives," Inigo grows increasingly uneasy at the village's strange inhabitants, who seem alternately hostile and overly friendly. He's reluctant to leave, however, after meeting the bewitching Hazel—despite her frantic warnings that he must leave Hobbswood before Midsummer's Eve. But it isn't until Inigo uncovers a foreboding scroll from 1658 that accuses a man named Thomas Messynger of being a devil worshipper that he gets closer to the village's dark secret; it's a past that will soon come to haunt Inigo and put him in grave danger. Along the way, Inigo enlists the help of an unlikely ally in unraveling the horrific mystery enshrouding the village. With deft, measured prose that gives readers maximum immersion in the ominous fictional town of Hobbswood, Tallon manages to spin a tale that invokes both the gloomy countryside of *Wuthering Heights* and the heart-pounding jump scares of Stephen King. The author's love for the Suffolk countryside is obvious in his lush natural descriptions ("The gorse, which heralded the beginning of the untamed heathland so characteristic of this part of the Suffolk coast, was no longer in flower"). And just when you think Tallon is losing his deft touch, he manages to throw in one final twist that gives hope for a possible sequel.

An expertly plotted novel that blends creepy atmospherics with rich characterization.