

LoveReading Reader reviews of The Enchanted by Rene Denfeld

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.

Fiona Ellwood

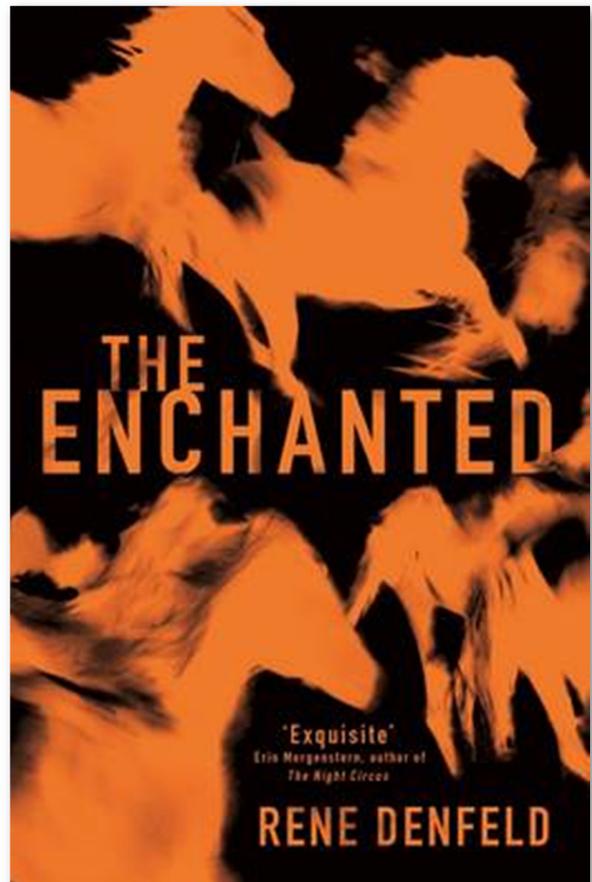
A lyrically described picture of a stark and frightening world, with redemption at the end.

This is an extraordinary debut novel by death row investigator Rene Denfeld.

The narrator is an unnamed prisoner on Death Row in an unnamed high security prison. Mute by choice, the narrator tells the stories of fellow inmates, and the Warden, the Lady and the Priest. The Lady is a mitigation specialist, trying to do good in an evil world. One source of evil is the guard Conroy, who has power of life and death over the inmates.

*This stark and frightening world is illuminated by magic, though we don't find out if it is only in the narrator's head. As the tensions in the prison build, we find out more about him, and how he has become what he is. A monster? Yes, but **even a monster has a soul, and a story to be told.***

*In one sense, this was not an enjoyable read. How could it be so, when it recounts such a horrific story? But I could not stop reading it, and I feel sure I will remember not only the story with its redemptive ending, but the beautiful lyrical language. **Highly recommended.***



Edel Waugh

Tornado of Emotions!

This was one of those books that you race through excited to the last page then sit there at the end amazed, completely dumbstruck and awed by what you have just read. This book was so good that I stayed up all night reading it because I could not put it down. I literally could not put it down!

*I made tea with this in my hand, I had conversations that I now don't remember because **these characters were almost living breathing people as I read, and while I was emotionally invested in what was happening to them my own life blurred around the edges until I finished the last sentence.** There is a lot in this story that formed a lump in the back of my throat and we get glimpses of crimes that had we known every detail we would never close our eyes again. The writing was so beautiful and even when the plot contained violence there was beauty in the sentences. It really excites me when I read something this good that causes a storm of emotions and makes you feel alive and grateful and unable to leave the book down. This is an author to get very excited about.*

I received this book from the cool guys over at [Lovereading.co.uk](http://lovereading.co.uk) for review.

You can follow Edel's blog at: <http://edelwaugh.blogspot.ie/>

Phyl Smithson

This is a remarkable and incredibly powerful book! *One that should come with a warning sign, do not read if you are of troubled mind as it really digs deep into your psyche. It's brilliant!*

The story unfolds through the eyes of a Death Row prisoner. We never learn his name but through him we grow to know various characters which touch him in very different ways. The constant in all of the contributors to the story is that their past has largely/singularly created their presence – who they are and why they are here they are.

We meet 'the lady' as she attempts to save a prisoner, York, sentenced to death. The challenge is he wants to die. Only she wants to save him and by doing so, in many ways she is clawing to ease her own troubled past.

The Priest too is a victim of his history and is in many trying to absolve himself for his failure to achieve complete priesthood by absorbing himself into an

environment he is not mentally strong enough to readily cope.

Other characters are introduced as 'The Lady' digs into York's past that has led him to the now. She uncovers, through hard work and absolute, all-consuming commitment, his Aunt Bessie, his Father, his former doctor. Her challenge is that the clock is rapidly ticking towards York's demise.

To find out who wins is why you must read this book

*I have been left troubled by the story as it has triggered many thoughts in my own life. **I can only thank Rene Denfeld for writing 'The Enchanted.'***

Kerry Bridges

A brilliant, must read book about the thoughts and feelings of some death row inmates and those who must deal with them. I loved this book and I highly recommend it!

For a book about such a dark subject, this one really is beautiful. The language used is gentle and lyrical and although the subject matter is never skipped over or made insignificant, it is almost made more deadly by the matter of fact way it is dealt with. The book deals with the story of one of the prisoners on death row in a very old prison, through the eyes of another and through his dealings with a death row investigator, "the lady". However, it is so much more than that - describing the thoughts and feelings of some very damaged people in a completely sympathetic way. I loved it!

You can follow Kerry on Twitter: @CSandL

Katie Hoare

The reader is enticed straight away from page one into 'The Enchanted', an intriguing debut novel, by Rene Denfeld. The narrator is an unnamed man on death row, who provides observations to his reader, about prison life and about the next three main characters, York, another prisoner, The Lady, a death row investigator who is trying to get York off death row, and the Priest. However, you do find out about some of the other characters in the prison, and some people who are connected to the main characters in this story. You will also note that there are some parallels with some of the characters, and that all have their own strengths, flaws and weaknesses.

You are informed about some of the prisons brutality, but how a book is entwined with the enchantments and magic that is combined within the prison

life, where some are able to see or sense things. You are aware that this is an old building and not a very nice place to be, and are aware of the good, bad and indifferent relationships between prisoners and in some cases with the guards.

This excellent read, with wonderful observations and descriptions, how a place where there is a lot of men who have done evil things, can have moments of tenderness. This is written by a real life death row investigator who has shown her knowledge of an environment can be used in an excellent work of fiction.

Angela Rhodes

Ok, first things first, this is a novel about Death Row, not a fairy tale, though there is magic in it.

The story centers on 'The Lady', who is a mitigation specialist, a prisoner who sits on death row and escapes with his words and dreams. He has no name and we don't know his crime. Then we have York, the prisoner in the next cell, and lastly the priest,

It's not in any way an easy read, but it is captivating, in such a way that you savour your freedom, contemplate how men and women end up on death row and what goes through the minds of them.

It is lyrical, bewitching, and haunting.

If a novel should ever be made into a film, then this is it. I think personally it could become a classic.

Hazel Saegert

An absolutely stunning debut novel from the (previously) nonfiction author Rene Denfield, The Enchanted will intrigue you from the very first page.

The enchanted place of the title is a maximum security prison, home to high profile inmates and a darkly sinister death row dungeon. This is where we find the nameless narrator, a highly troubled character who finds solace through the second hand novels that trickle through from the prison library and his imagining of the undeniably threatening environment that he finds himself in as a place of magic and wonder.

Running alongside the fantastical first person narrative of the nameless death row inmate is the story of 'The Lady', a criminal lawyer who is struggling to

save the prisoner, York, from the death penalty, despite the fact that York himself doesn't wish to be saved. Although narrated from a third person perspective, it sometimes feels as if the nameless death row prisoner is in fact telling the Lady's story for her, increasing the distorted sense of reality and powerlessness that exists within the prison's walls.

As 'The Enchanted' reaches its beautiful and unexpected conclusion, we come to realise, despite the setting, just how much this is a novel about fate, love and what it means to be human.

Gary Simkins

An enthralling read. An insight of a world that I hope I never encounter but has always interested me.

*I received a copy of this late but was thankful I had the chance to read it. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this novel. **I've been a fan of reading stories of prison life, from King's 'Rita Hayworth' and 'Shawshank Redemption' and 'The Green Mile' to Green's 'Green River Rising' and I found this story thoroughly enjoyable and haunting.** I loved it from start to finish. It never let me down, captivating, enthralling. I recommend it!*

Magdalena Vidgen

This is undoubtedly one of the best books I have read in a while. Not something I would have picked myself, but it hooked me from the very first page.

As a rule I don't read depressing misery memoirs or prison stories. But 'The Enchanted', although in essence both of these, is very different.

This book moved me and made me think – two of main things I look for in a novel.

It is a story of an inmate on death row told by another, unnamed prisoner. Although it tells of abuse, neglect and crime, it's not graphic, but it is told with an unusual economy of language and imagery; simplicity of style making it somehow poetic.

As my husband summed it up: "Age 18 certificate subject told in 15 certificate language".

We read about horrible crimes on 'the outside' and atrocities committed in

prison, by inmates and guards alike. But there is no judgement or condemnation. There is no simple morality. All people in this story are in a way broken. This makes the book deeply humane.

It brings to mind 'Shawshank Redemption and 'The Green Mile'.

I give this book full five stars.

Claire Hill

This beautifully told and haunting debut from Rene Denfeld will immerse you in a dark and violent world, whilst simultaneously pulling at your heartstrings.

This is Rene Denfeld's, debut novel and will be published on 13th March 2014. I'd like to thank everyone at The Lovereading Review Team for the ARC of this book, which I received in return for an honest review.

A death row inmate sits in his underground cell in a high security prison. Although he does not speak, he daydreams in words that weave a magical world far removed from his stark reality. The darkness of the prison world is unveiled through the words he listens to in his dreams. He listens to the lives of those around him and shares his profound perceptions here.

This captivating story focuses on several different people including a death penalty investigator referred to as 'The Lady'; the priest; York, the prisoner in the next cell and The Lady's current client; and a young lad experiencing his first traumatic prison sentence. The deeply personal and disturbing childhood of The Lady, along with York's, is described in heart-wrenching detail using the words the prisoner hears.

The author's intricate use of vocabulary to convey the raw emotion of this beautifully told and haunting tale make this a truly mesmerising read. The attention to the tiniest detail at every step along the journey contributes to the quality of this brilliantly seductive book. 4.5/5 stars.

You can follow Claire on Twitter: @claireh18

Sarah Musk

An unusual book dealing with a difficult subject. It is quite harrowing and difficult to read in parts but a book that you will find hard to forget.

'The Enchanted' is an unusual book. The narrator is always unknown and is listening to conversations between a death penalty investigator only ever referred to as 'The Lady' - and a condemned prisoner in the next cell who does not want to be saved. The narrator is obviously seriously disturbed but also has heightened sensitivities to the enclosed world around him and to the emotions of the people he hears in the cells outside. He will not communicate with anyone but just listens and imagines.

The author very skilfully describes the terrible lives some of the people have had before coming to prison - including The Lady who had an abusive childhood. She does this so well that even though these criminals have committed brutal crimes you feel some sympathy for them because they had such hopeless, sad starts to their lives.

I don't think I will ever forget this book. It was disturbing but beautifully written. It deals very honestly and sensitively with a difficult subject - I did notice that the author is herself a death penalty investigator which means that what she has written is from personal experience. This is why the book seems so vivid and real.

Judith Griffith

A compelling read about the dark bowels of an American prison - so well-written that you just have to keep reading. A great debut novel. Highly recommended!

Upon reading the precis for 'The Enchanted' by Rene Denfeld, you could be forgiven for thinking that the basis of the story is a familiar one - a prisoner on Death Row and the lives of those around him.

However, once you start reading, you realise that this is much more than a run-of-the-mill 'being in jail' story. The narrative and language used suck you in and you quickly feel as if you're part of the prison life, as well as of those lucky enough to be outside of it. The story focuses on several characters - some nicer than others, but Denfeld's skill as a writer makes you want to read what happens to all of them. Yes, parts of the story are grim (and realistic), but Denfeld hints at some of the major crimes in the story, rather than revealing them, which I think makes a nice change.

I really enjoyed reading the book - it's a great debut novel and is very well-written. Things close to our heart - books and words, play a central part in the incarcerated world of the main character. It's a compelling read - I'm loathe to

use the phrase 'page-turner', but it is. Parts of it are heart-breaking but I highly recommend reading this - beg, borrow or buy a copy!

You can follow Judith on Twitter: @gogrygbi

Jennifer Rainbow

This a mesmerising novel that draws you in and grips you tightly until you get to the final page. An effortless read with exquisite writing that tells you stories that may affect you but you won't be able to stop.

The exquisite writing lulls you into a false sense of security, but this isn't a fantasy story no matter what the title may suggest, horrors lurk within these pages. Not horrors of the imagination but the horrors of life.

This is a novel set in a prison for murderers, where they await their sentence of death. The author blends together information about the prison system, imagery and the story of these well drawn characters.

It's an interesting story narrated by one of the inmates who is nameless until the end. It tells of the woman whose job it is to find the truth about these criminals and help change their punishment. And through her the story of York. It is her job to investigate his case and get his punishment changed from death to life imprisonment. You want to feel for these characters but then you remember: they're murderers, you can't feel sorry for them: "she knows too well how much pain these men caused others to feel true grief herself at their passing. The sadness she feels is more about a failed life."

There is so much depth in this story, so much that I can't begin to do it justice in this review. It's a story that will stop you and make you think, it will open your eyes to a world you didn't know about. Not a fantasy world but a real world.

You can follow Jennifer's blog at: <http://possessedbyprose.blogspot.co.uk/>

Victoria Sharman

This is a fantastic book and if you haven't had a chance yourself to read it then you must.

Not the kind of book I was expecting but this had me hooked from the moment I read the first line right up to the last sentence. This enchanted world! A delight to read even if the subject was kind of morbid. Written in a very sing song way a touching memoir of a prisoner on death row. Feeling and seeing but never

speaking. A must read!

Katie Hoare

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You can follow Katie on Twitter: @boggedoff