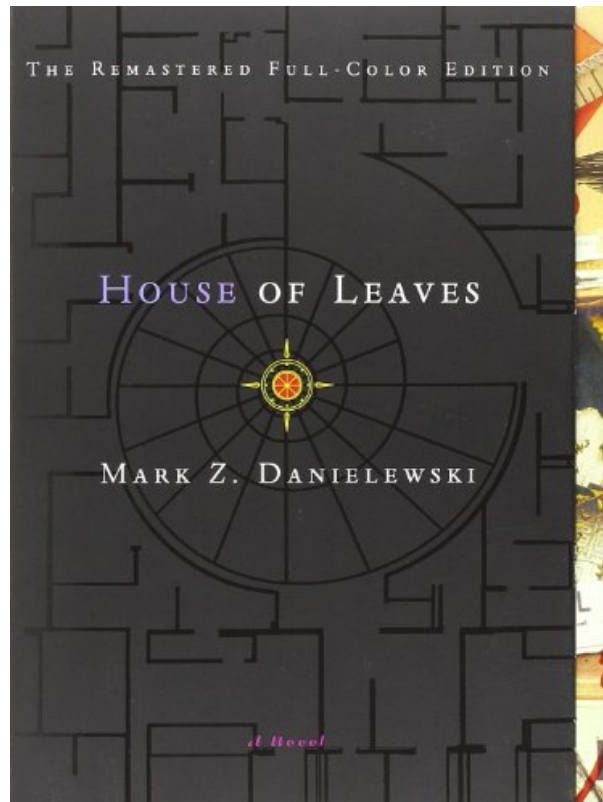
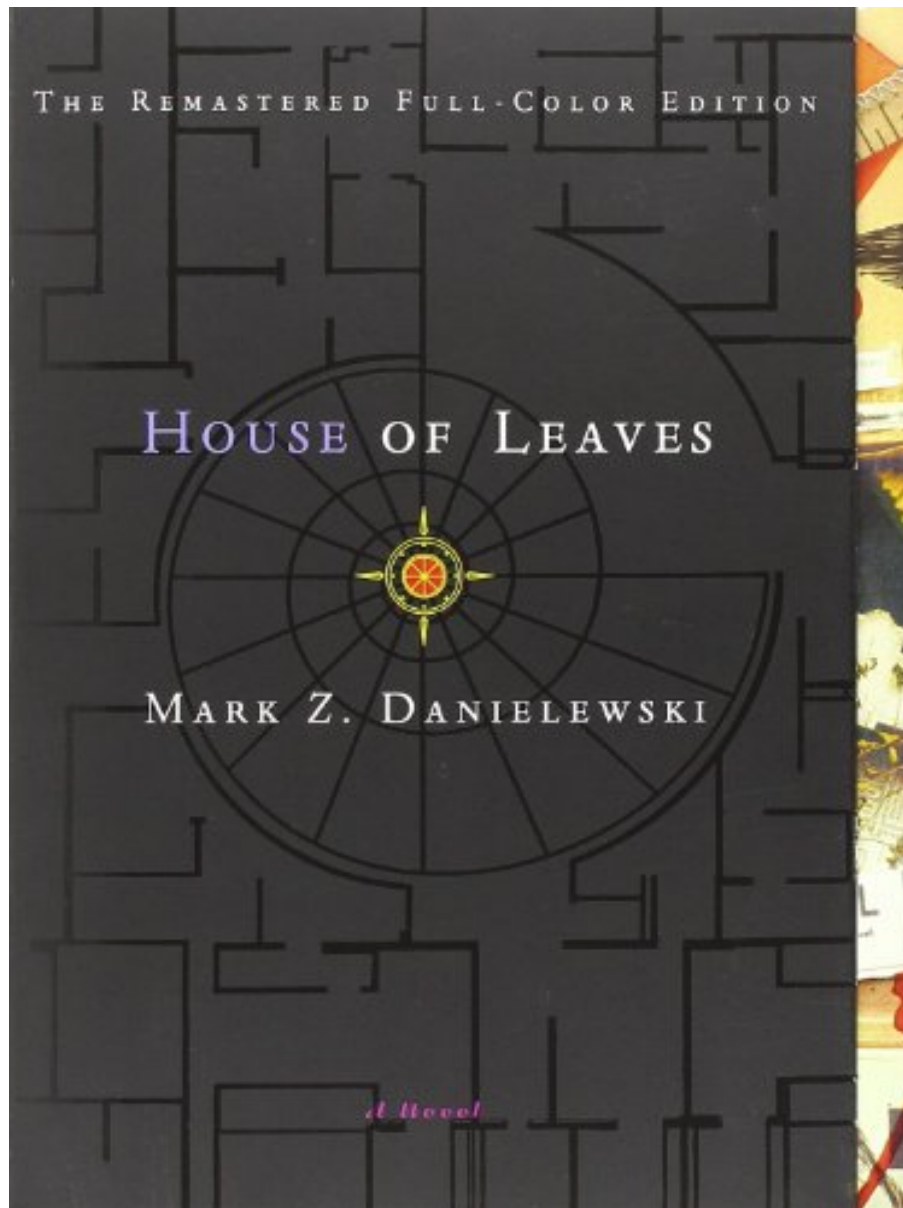


# HOUSE OF LEAVES BY MARK Z. DANIELEWSKI



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Now that we've reached the post-postmodern era, presumably there's nobody left who needs liberating from the strictures of conventional fiction. So apart from its narrative high jinks, what does House of Leaves have to offer? According to Johnny Truant, the tattoo-shop apprentice who discovers Zampanò's work, once you read The Navidson Record, For some reason, you will no longer be the person you believed you once were. You'll detect slow and subtle shifts going on all around you, more importantly shifts in you. Worse, you'll realize it's always been shifting, like a shimmer of sorts, a vast shimmer, only dark like a room. But you won't understand why or how. We'll have to take his word for it, however. As it's presented here, the description of the spooky film isn't continuous enough to have much scare power. Instead, we're pulled back into Johnny Truant's world through his footnotes, which he uses to discharge everything in his head, including the discovery of the manuscript, his encounters with people who knew Zampanò, and his own battles with drugs, sex, ennui, and a vague evil force. If The Navidson Record is a mad professor lecturing on the supernatural with rational-seeming conviction, Truant's footnotes are the manic student in the back of the auditorium, wigged out and furiously scribbling whoa-dude notes about life.

Despite his flaws, Truant is an appealingly earnest amateur editor--finding translators, tracking down sources, pointing out incongruities. Danielewski takes an academic's--or ex-academic's--glee in footnotes (the similarity to David Foster Wallace is almost too obvious to mention), as well as other bogus ivory-tower trappings such as interviews with celebrity scholars like Camille Paglia and Harold Bloom. And he stuffs highbrow and pop-culture references (and parodies) into the novel with the enthusiasm of an anarchist filling a pipe bomb with bits of junk metal. House of Leaves may not be the prettiest or most coherent collection, but if you're trying to blow stuff up, who cares? --John Poyicsanyi

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Years ago, when *House of Leaves* was first being passed around, it was nothing more than a badly bundled heap of paper, parts of which would occasionally surface on the Internet. No one could have anticipated the small but devoted following this terrifying story would soon command. Starting with an odd assortment of marginalized youth -- musicians, tattoo artists, programmers, strippers, environmentalists, and adrenaline junkies -- the book eventually made its way into the hands of older generations, who not only found themselves in those strangely arranged pages but also discovered a way back into the lives of their estranged children.

Now, for the first time, this astonishing novel is made available in book form, complete with the original colored words, vertical footnotes, and newly added second and third appendices.

The story remains unchanged, focusing on a young family that moves into a small home on Ash Tree Lane where they discover something is terribly wrong: their house is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside.

Of course, neither Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Will Navidson nor his companion Karen Green was prepared to face the consequences of that impossibility, until the day their two little children wandered off and their voices eerily began to return another story -- of creature darkness, of an ever-growing abyss behind a closet door, and of that unholy growl which soon enough would tear through their walls and consume all their dreams.

- Sales Rank: #1200 in Books
- Color: Black
- Brand: Danielewski, Mark Z.
- Published on: 2000-03-07
- Released on: 2000-03-07
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.20" h x 1.30" w x 7.00" l, 2.60 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 709 pages

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

939 of 984 people found the following review helpful.

For Sale By Owner

By C. Fletcher

I first heard of "House of Leaves" about a year ago on the Internet. Somebody said it was the best new horror novel they had read in years. Then when I started working at a bookstore in town, one of my new friends there told me it was the scariest book he had ever read.

All of this quite intrigued me. So I bought the book and read it over a period of about six months. It's not a quick read, or at least it wasn't for me. I had to have other, more normal, sane books going on at the same time. "House of Leaves" is over seven hundred pages long and it's loaded with literary detour signs, unsuspected landmines (some duds, some live), and good old "holding the book upside down in a mirror so you can read the words printed that way" fun.

"House of Leaves" is a contortionist's daydream, and a conservative reader's nightmare. I fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum and found myself admiring the new unhallowed ground Danielewski was breaking, but at other times longing for a more conventional, satisfying structure.

This whole thing is very postmodern. The house is aware of itself as a house, and the book is aware of itself as a book. There is a story of a family moving into a house, trying to sort out its interpersonal demons, and finding that the insides of things (lives, minds, houses) can often be darker, scarier, stranger, and more convoluted than they would appear from the outsides.

That alone would have made a great book, told with inventive language and a compelling psychological subtext.

But that's just the beginning, the backstory really. "House of Leaves" is a story inside a story inside a story, etc. In fact, it puts the dizzying structure of Mary Shelly's "Frankenstein" to shame.

In "House of Leaves," there's a young guy named Johnny Truant who's acting as literary editor, presenting the compelling and disturbing scribbles and ramblings on an old man named Zampano. Zampano's papers, which are presented posthumously, recount, at times blow-for-blow, a documentary film called "The Navidson Record" of a family moving into a house which proves to be larger on the inside than it is on the outside.

There is also another editor above Johnny, who makes comments on top of Johnny's comments. Johnny finds himself wondering if the old man didn't just make up the whole story about the young family moving into the house, because Johnny is unable to find any corroborating scrap of proof that the film exists.

Of course, add into the mix that Johnny is a self-admitted fibber and story teller extraordinaire. He tells us how much fun he has making up completely bogus stories for the benefit of strangers he meets in bars.

Knowing this, the reader has to start to wonder if the old man, Zampano, even exists, or if he's just an invention of Johnny's. And if you follow that line of thinking too far, you might even start to wonder if the heavy black book you're holding exists.

This is the haunted house that's in the film that the old man made up and wrote about as if it were as real as he was, but who was really just a figment of the narrator's fertile imagination, the narrator that doesn't really exist, except on paper and in the reader's mind and imagination...so maybe none of it exists...or all of it does. Maybe the house has turned on its porch lights somewhere deep, deep inside of you, down all those twisting tunnels and swirling, dark echoing caves.

Maybe there's a sign out front. "For Sale By Owner." And under that, in small print, in French, upside down and backwards, "Buyer Beware."

202 of 218 people found the following review helpful.

a challenging read, but a fascinating one

By Kitten With a Whip

I had never heard of this book when I picked it up, and I'm glad. I actually meant to order another book from my book club, but ordered this one mistakenly. My first thought was "House of Leaves, that looks boring, maybe I can give it as a gift". Then I saw the quotes on the back by some of my favorite authors and wondered if I should give it a chance. Then I flipped through it and was interested by the way the book was put together. Then I read the description on the inside cover (which is mostly fictional) about the book being a collection of papers that circulated for a while on the internet, but had never been put together in a book format before, and the story about a house whose dimensions keep changing, and I was intrigued.

This is definitely a challenging read, in that it demands your full attention. In a couple places, it tells you to skip to the appendices and read a certain section, then return to where you were. The narrative goes back and forth between Johnny Truant's first person narrative (told in sections and footnotes) of how the book, by an elderly blind man who lived in his apartment complex and may not have been entirely sane, came into his possession and what it has done to his mind and his life, and the story told by the blind man about...about...you know, this is really a hard book for me to describe. It has stories within stories, about 800 different typefaces (it must have driven the typesetters, or whoever did the formatting at the publishing house, crazy) and formats that include interviews, bibliographiess, letters, transcripts, and even a section where there are just photographs of different scraps of paper. I probably had the most fun with the letter from Johnny Truant's mother that you actually have to take a pen and decode, because you have to take the first letter of every word and stick them together. I tried doing it my head, but was too tired, and ended up getting a pen and just taking the time to write it out and then read it. Unlike some of the unusual stuff in the book that really turned out to be meaningless or a dead end, the decoded letter turned out to be frightening (I actually had to toss the piece of paper it was written out on because I was worried someone would think I wrote it and had lost my mind).

This wasn't the scariest book I've ever read, but certain parts were very, very creepy and unsettling. Ever since I read *The Legend of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson, the idea of a house where the measurements don't quite add up or actually change has scared the bejeezus out of me. True, you never see a monster, but to me, what you can imagine is always scarier than anything the author can dream up-the fear of the unseen. It's what scared some people so bad about *The Blair Witch Project* (dang it-I was hoping I could review this book without mentioning that movie!) I'm glad I read it at home where I could give it my full attention and not have people staring at me when I turned the book sideways and upside down and even turning it in spirals to follow the bizarrely formatted text. I'm also glad I read it before I read any reviews or heard any hype about it whatsoever, unlike the *Blai*---arrgh! I did it again. I did have trouble getting into "The Navidson Record", but it proved interesting. I didn't have any trouble getting into the Johnny Truant narrative--especially since the style of writing reminded me of the way Skipp and Spector used to write together (I really miss them).

Recommended for those looking for something different, or who want to read something that is engrossing enough to 'escape'. Also recommended to horror fans with an open mind. Not recommended reading, however, if you feel woozy or have a headache. For instance, every time the word 'house' is written, the typeface is slightly lighter than the rest of the text, and at first I couldn't tell if I were imagining it or not. I also made the mistake of trying to read part of the book when I was getting over an ear infection and still had some 'vertigo'- I had to put it down because rotating the book back and forth was starting to make me feel like I had the bedspins. If you're bored and want to read something different and challenging, and amusing? Definitely recommended.

153 of 170 people found the following review helpful.

Good ol' fashion head games

By A Customer

I was attracted to House of Leaves because of an article about it in Newsweek. That sent me to this site, where I found the critics polarized: Joe Pro loved it, Joe Shmoe hated it. I had to find out for myself!

If you're like me and don't usually use words such as "metafiction" and "no vivifying center," I just want to say, the book was a total hoot. At times trying, yes. But so is Monty Python--I think it takes that experimental attitude to reach the breakthrough stuff. Contrary to other reviewers, I found the central narrative genuinely eerie, much more so than anything I've read by Steven King or Dean Koontz. In some places I was turning the pages breathlessly. At the same time, I found myself chuckling with delight at pages that are typeset to match the scenes they describe. For example, in one scene where explorers are hopelessly lost, the pages feature dense footnotes in random columns -- some even printed upside-down, some backwards. As you try to puzzle out what to read next, you suddenly realize you are experiencing some of the same disorientation as the explorers. I think this is just plain old fun. The author purposely interrupts the story in places to frustrate you; saves some of the best stuff for obscure appendixes (be sure to read the letters from Johnny Truant's institutionalized Mom); and generally challenges your assumptions about what a book is supposed to do or be. At the same time, for the most part he delivers the goods in the old-fashioned narrative sense.

So, yeah, it takes a little work to read, and it's not conventional, and it's not perfect. But it's ORIGINAL. I'm REALLY glad I bought it. I enjoyed it a ton, and the emotions of the book continue to resonate with me days after finishing it. If any of you reading this enjoyed David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest, as I did, House of Leaves is simply a must. And, if you are tired of slick, predictable stories that give you nothing to think about, I think you should give House of Leaves a chance.

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-Jim Dwyer, California State Univ. Lib., Chico

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