

The Devouring Study Guide

The Devouring by Simon Holt

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Plot Summary

The Devouring by Simon Holt begins with a prologue from the point of view of young Macie Canfield. Macie's younger brother is being punished for not putting the cows in the barn. Their drunkard father hangs Jeremiah from the scarecrow pole in the field as a punishment. Jeremiah is afraid and is soon attacked by the Vours, a group of entities that feed on one's fears.

The story shifts to 15-year-old Regina Halloway reading a story to her eight-year-old brother Henry. Reggie loves horror stories and shares them with Henry who often becomes frightened. Reggie and her mother had shared the same bond and Reggie wants to carry on the tradition, especially now since their mother has disappeared.

Reggie and her best friend Aaron are horror buffs. The heart of the story begins when Reggie finds a journal written by Macie Canfield, a local woman whose brother had been attacked by Vours. Reggie and Aaron are fascinated by the tale but certainly do not believe it.

Reggie and Aaron consult Reggie's boss, Eben, owner of Something Wicked, a bookstore. Eben is a mysterious creature who says little but repeatedly warns the friend not to take things so lightly. Eben warns the friends that sometimes one can make something become true simply by believing in it. Reggie and Aaron do not heed Eben's words.

Things change drastically when Reggie and Aaron summon the Vours. The Vours do not attack Reggie or Aaron but rather the young Henry, who is much more susceptible to the fear.

Reggie and Aaron must find answers regarding the Vours and discover a way to save Henry from eternal doom.

Reggie, Aaron and Eben go to the Canfield house and find the body of Jeremiah Canfield, who had been boarded up in a room in the cellar. There, Reggie gets her first face to face meeting with a Vour. The trio escapes from the house. Reggie returns later, determined to kill the Vour with cold. Meanwhile Reggie's crush, Quinn, who is also a Vour, sets the house on fire and Reggie barely escapes alive.

Reggie is thrown into her fears and must also face the fears experienced by Henry if she is going to be able to save him. The only way to vanquish a Vour is to freeze it. After a struggle between Aaron and Quinn, Quinn drowns in Cutter's Lake. Henry is saved from the Vour that had attacked him.

Eben gets rid of Quinn's car and hints that he has had a great deal of experience with the Vours. Henry is rushed to the emergency room for treatment. The reader can surmise that there is a sequel to follow.



Prologue; Chapters 1-5

Prologue; Chapters 1-5 Summary

Prologue:

"On Sorry Night, just a few days before Christmas, you have to snuff the lamps, douse the flames in the fireplace, and spend the night in the cold and dark. If you don't, the Vours will get you." Prologue, p. 1

The author says that he saw the Vours one night as a child and has lived in fear ever since. The author's father had come into the house with empty and cold eyes, the look he often got when he drank. The cows had not been put in the barn and someone would have to be punished. Jeremiah was the target. The man puts Jeremiah up on the scarecrow pole ordering him to scare with the crows even though Jeremiah states that it is winter and there is no corn. The girl cries for her ten-year-old brother. Jeremiah says he could feel the monsters in the night waiting to come and get him. Jeremiah calls the monsters the Vours. The girl, six years old, had been scared. She had run out in the field to Jeremiah and attempted to get him down from the pole. Something comes and sets Jeremiah on fire. The girl runs. The author says this is how the horror ended and also how it began. From the night Jeremiah's voice rings out in a chant:

"When dark creeps in and eats the light, Bury your fears on Sorry Night. For in the winter's blackest hours comes the feasting of the Vours. No one can see it, the life they stole, your body's here but not your soul..." Prologue, p. 4

Chapter 1:

The story begins with fifteen-year-old Reggie reading to her eight-year-old brother Henry. Reggie and Henry's mother had left them without a word almost a year ago. Since that time Reggie has taken on more responsibility around the house. One of Reggie's responsibilities is to read a bedtime story to Henry. Reggie has chosen a journal she found at her part-time job at a bookstore. It is a scary story about Vours that attack people on Sorry Night, the night of the Winter Solstice.

"Reggie discovered the book contained a bizarre, handwritten narrative of monsters called 'Vours' that could take over people's bodies and minds when they were most frightened. But according to the author, they could only do this one night a year, on Sorry Night, the night of the Winter Solstice." Chap. 1, p. 6

Henry is frightened and does not want to hear any more of the journal titled "The Devouring." Reggie feels bad that she has upset Henry. Reggie promises there will be no more scary stories. Henry begs Reggie to stay with him until he falls asleep.

Chapter 2:



Snow had fallen on Cutter's Wedge throughout the night. Henry is excited about snow and romps gleefully as he and Reggie walk to school. Reggie's best friend Aaron watches Henry play in the snow. Reggie warns Henry that he will be soaking wet by the time he gets to class. Aaron jokes that Reggie has become Henry's mother. Henry hits Aaron with a snowball and Aaron attacks.

After dropping Henry off at school, Reggie and Aaron go to Cutter High. Reggie and Aaron are neither popular nor unpopular. They are considered to be a part of the 'heynodders,' the group of people whom other students know for sometimes saying 'hey' in response to a greeting. In Reggie's minds she is not a noticeable sort. As Reggie and Aaron attempt to walk into the school they are confronted by the Kassner twins, Mitch and Keech. The boys are recent transfers from another school and seem to have only one purpose in life — to cause trouble. Keech steals Aaron hat and puts it on his head. Reggie attempts to stand up to the bully and tells him that his head is too fat to wear Aaron's hat. Keech takes a knife, makes two cuts into the hat and puts it back on his head. Reggie and Aaron walk away. Shortly after, Quinn Waters, a member of the football team, gets Aaron's hat from Keech and returns it to him. Aaron thanks Quinn. Aaron hands over a term paper and Quinn pays him. Reggie does not approve of Aaron's side business. Aaron leaves and Quinn confesses to Reggie that he has not read the play. Quinn assures Reggie that he is not some dumb jock. Reggie's bookbag falls to the floor and the journal falls out. Reggie admits to being a geek and that she likes to read and collect horror stuff. Quinn says geeks usually aren't cute and promises to save Reggie a seat in study hall. Reggie is stunned at her good fortune.

Chapter 3:

Reggie reads the comic book while Erin sits on the floor and reads from *The Devouring*. Aaron says that he can't get the book out of his head. Aaron wants to know if they are going to attempt to contact the Vours. Just as Reggie and Henry are setting up for their ritual, Reggie tells Henry that he should be in bed. Henry says he won't get in trouble because their dad is away overnight. Reggie sends Henry off to bed and tucks him in. Reggie says that in order to call the Vours they have to be afraid. Aaron puts a large wolf spider on Reggie's arm. Reggie is terrified of wolf spiders. Reggie screams and the spider skitters away. Aaron asks if she has turned into a Vour. Apparently the ritual has not worked.

Henry wakes up, disturbed by the blizzard. Henry begins to become afraid of the dark and tries to think of something good. He finally calls out for Reggie but she and Aaron are gone. Henry begins to call out for his mother and cries.

"Only the weeping when he entered his pleas, flooding him with fear, chilling his thoughts, and coagulating into something black and dead-until something alive and hungry pulled him towards sleep." Chap. 3, p. 25

The door opens and Henry's mother comes into the room. Henry asks if she is real. Mommy says she is always with him. Henry wonders why she is so cold.



Reggie and Aaron go out to the back porch. Aaron faces his fear by getting into the hot tub and attempting to stay underwater for an entire minute. Aaron has been terrified of water ever since he almost drowned at age seven. Aaron lasts only 19 seconds before he comes out of the water. Again, the ritual has not worked. The electricity goes out. Aaron goes home. Reggie goes upstairs and checks on Henry. She wonders why it is so cold.

Chapter 4:

Henry's behavior begins to change drastically. Reggie notices that Henry is pale and that his demeanor seems to be more emotionless. Reggie's father does not notice. Reggie also takes Henry's temperature and is alarmed by the fact that it is so low. Reggie thinks the thermometer is broken.

Reggie gets ready to go to work. She notices that Henry's bedroom door is closed, which is unusual. Reggie hears Henry whispering to his favorite stuffed toy, Kappy the koala. Reggie opens the door and finds Henry pulling out the animal's fur.

Chapter 5:

Reggie goes to work at her part-time job at a bookstore called Something Wicked.

"Something Wicked seemed to materialize as a safe haven for Reggie in the year before Mom left, when things between her parents were strained at best and explosive at worst. Mom's behavior became increasingly strange and secretive; Dad's turned angry and suspicious." Chap. 5, p. 43

Reggie's boss, Eben, comments that she is late. Reggie jokes with Eben but notices that his patience is wearing thin. Eben does good business on his website but rarely anyone comes into the cluttered and disarrayed bookstore. Reggie and Eben quote passages to each other from Lovecraft and Poe.

Reggie confides to Eben about Henry's sick behavior. Eben tells Reggie to give her father a chance — that he is dealing with some big issues.

Aaron comes in to pick up his book on serial killers. Aaron and Reggie tell Eben about their fear ritual. Eben asks for an explanation. Reggie takes the Journal from her backpack and Eben reads the first paragraph aloud:

"The Vours are all around us. They wear our names and faces, but they are not us. The most dangerous thing we are ever told is, 'there is nothing to be afraid of,' because, in truth, there is so very much to fear." Chap. 5, p. 48

Evan asks Reggie where she got the book. Reggie says it came in one of the store's shipments. Eben says he wants Reggie to tell him when she borrows books and comments that the journal is a singular find.



"It's just the diary of some crazy old kook, Eben. She writes about these monsters called the Vours that attack humans when they're most afraid - like, can't-speak-or-blink-or-breathe afraid. They take over your body and send your consciousness to some demonic hell, then they live your life out. And they look and act like regular humans, so it's impossible to tell who's a Vour and who's not." Chap. 5, p. 49

Eben is not pleased that Reggie and Aaron have attempted to create a ritual based on the information in the Journal. Eben tells them that attempting to contact such creatures can make them real. Reggie doesn't understand why Eben is so upset.

Reggie leaves the bookstore and sees Henry on the street talking with Quinn. Reggie is furious and yells at Henry for being out on the streets after dark. Quinn says he was just giving Henry the same lecture. Henry says he was just going to the bookstore and that it was late when he started out. Mrs. Boswell had fallen asleep so Henry had been able to sneak out. Quinn gives Reggie a gift — a leather bound copy of Bram Stoker's Dracula. Quinn says they can be geeks together.

Reggie and Henry go home. Henry runs up to his room before Reggie can scold him further. Reggie goes into the living room and finds that Mrs. Boswell is dead.

Prologue; Chapters 1-5 Analysis

The reader is introduced to Reggie and Henry. Reggie has been forced to mature rapidly since the departure of her mother. Henry, instead of maturing over the past year, is reverting to a frightened child. This concerns Reggie. Although Reggie willingly protects her younger brother, his clinginess is beginning to suffocate her.

Reggie's friend Aaron is introduced. Aaron is a different sort; he has a B-movie personality and is often considered to be a little odd. Aaron is incredibly smart but awkward in most other ways.

In many ways Reggie is much like every other teenage girl. She feels plain and out of place. Reggie says that if her life was a movie that she would be an extra. Reggie has a crush on Quinn Waters but feels that a guy like Quinn would never look at her twice. Reggie is stunned when Quinn knows her name.

It is clear that Reggie and Aaron don't really believe in the Vours but they think it is some kind of strange horror story, much like the referenced Bloody Mary tale. The attempt to contact the Vours fails and the friends giggle as they walk downstairs.

Aaron seems to be much more terrified by his attempt at contacting Vours. Aaron is also upset with himself that he can't even last for a minute underwater. Aaron refers to himself as a wimp and ignores Reggie's attempts to defend him. Aaron leaves, disheartened.



The contact between Henry and his mother suggests that the Vours have arrived after all. Henry's mother is obviously dead but has come back to her little boy. It is unclear if Henry's mother intends to take over his soul.

The reader gets insight into Reggie's relationship with Eben. Eben is almost like a grandfatherly figure in Reggie's life. Eben understands Reggie's fascination with horror. Although Reggie and Eben joke around a lot, Reggie respects him. It seems that Eben has some sort of secret by his reaction to the ritual staged by Reggie and Aaron. Reggie does not yet understand what they have done.

Reggie is distracted and thrilled by the attention she receives from Quinn.

The death of Mrs. Boswell is not yet determined but the reader is left to wonder if it has anything to do with the Vours.



Chapters 6-11

Chapters 6-11 Summary

Chapter 6:

Reggie and Henry's Dad comes home from work. Mrs. Boswell is being wheeled out on a gurney. While Henry is upstairs Reggie and her father talk about how they will explain the death. Dad decides that Henry understands death. Reggie looks at the Christmas tree and thinks that the night it was decorated had been one of the few happy times they've had in the home since her mother left. They'd spent the entire evening putting ornaments on the tree while Dad sang Christmas carols.

Reggie goes to bed. Her thoughts go between thinking about Henry's strange behavior and Quinn. Reggie also thinks about Mrs. Boswell. Reggie finally falls asleep.

Reggie has a nightmare. She dreams that she wakes up at 12:41 AM to the sound of Christmas carols. Reggie thinks it's much too late for Christmas carolers and wonders if Dad has been drinking scotch and has started singing again. Reggie goes downstairs to find her father standing at the window. Five Christmas carolers stand outside singing "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town." Reggie comments to her father that it is almost 1 o'clock in the morning and much too late for Christmas carolers. Henry says he does not like the carolers. The voices sound strange to Reggie. The children put down their books and she sees their faces.

"They were children, but not human - red and green veins crisscrossed their ashen skin, and their sunken eyes peered out, red as blood." Chap. 6, p. 59

Dad apologizes and says he knew they were coming. The demons crash through the window and attack Reggie. Henry screams not to let them get him. One of the demons says that they are all cripples. Reggie gets torn apart and breaks into puzzle size pieces onto the floor. Henry screams. The demons say there is no way out.

Reggie wakes up, terrified. She runs to Henry's room and finds that he is not there. Reggie goes downstairs and finds Henry sitting in front of a blazing fireplace. Henry says he is cold. Reggie tells Henry that he shouldn't be playing with fire. Once again Reggie asks Henry why he was out at night. Henry says he doesn't need any help — that he's fine. Henry sticks his hand into the fire. Reggie pulls him away. Their father comes into the room and demands to know who started the fire. Reggie explains. Henry says he doesn't know how to start a fire, that Reggie did it. Henry says Reggie made him promise not to tell. Reggie is furious but Dad does not believe her.

Chapter 7:



It is Christmas eve morning. Dad goes off to work. Reggie is under house arrest. Dad will call every hour to make sure she is home. Reggie thinks about Henry and how he had turned on her the night before.

"They'd fought countless times before; argued, yelled, wrestled, argued, slapped, smacked. Henry had tattled, baited, blamed, annoyed, meddled, and eavesdropped on her like any little brother. But he'd never lied. Not until last night." Chap. 7, p. 66

Reggie decides to make Henry's favorite breakfast, hoping that she could coax him to talk. Reggie goes to Henry's room and finds that General Squeak, the hamster, is missing. It was not uncommon for General Squeak to get out of his cage. Reggie usually found him in the bathroom at the end of the hall. Reggie goes into the bathroom but cannot find the hamster. Reggie notices that the toilet is threatening to overflow. Reggie finds Gen. Squeak in the toilet. The hamster is mangled. Reggie does not know how to tell Henry. Reggie tells Henry and is surprised by his emotionless state.

Aaron comes over to help Reggie bury General Squeak. Reggie tells Aaron that she is concerned about Henry. Henry, bundled in many layers of clothes, comes outside. He tells Aaron that Reggie is grounded and he must go away; their Dad does not like Aaron very much. Aaron asks Henry if he can speak to him for a minute. Henry resists at first. Aaron asks Henry if he is okay; Henry says he is fine. Henry attacks Aaron. When Reggie attempts to help, Henry attacks Reggie. Henry tells Aaron to go away — that he is not welcome. When the snow hits Henry's skin it burns him.

Chapter 8:

Aaron gets on his bike and rushes Reggie to Eben's house. Reggie thinks. When she wakes up she recognizes the house. Aaron explains that he doesn't want to have to explain the situation to his mother. Eben seems concerned. Reggie will be okay save for some bruises. Reggie thinks she looks like the punching bag. The trio discusses what happened back at the house. Aaron says he believes that Henry is no longer Henry; that something happened the night they did the Vour ritual. Reggie thinks Aaron is crazy. Aaron attempts to convince Reggie with no success. The only thing Reggie and Aaron can't seem to agree on is that something has happened to Henry and they have to get help. Reggie realizes that Henry is home alone and she has to get there before her Dad gets home or get into more trouble.

Reggie goes outside and finds Quinn waiting for her. Quinn offers Reggie a ride home. Dad pulls up and Reggie gets in the truck. Dad is furious.

Chapter 9:

Dad takes Reggie home. Reggie finds nothing joyous about this holiday. Reggie thinks about what Aaron said - to stay away from Henry tonight. After Reggie goes to bed Henry comes in and apologizes. Reggie attempts to find out what has changed about Henry but gets nowhere. Henry tells Reggie that he has presents for her and he thinks she will like them.



"Ever since Sorry Night, life had gone from difficult to dismal. When she first had borrowed the devouring, it seemed twisted and fun. Now, she recalled its pages as emanations of darkness and madness. She regretted ever picking it up." Chap. 9, p. 85

Reggie can't sleep. She sees a large spider crawling down the wall. She thinks it is the spider that got loose the night Aaron was in her room. The spider on the wall hisses and Reggie can hear another creature reply above the vent. A chorus of replies comes from above the vent and the vent collapses to the floor.

"A mass of scrambling legs and dripping fangs poured down the wall and flooded onto the floor like a dark boiling slime." Chap. 9, p. 86

Reggie screams. Dad and Henry come rushing into the room. Dad tries to assure Reggie that it was nothing but a nightmare. Reggie screams at Henry to get away from her, knowing that he is responsible for the spiders.

Chapter 10:

Dad and Henry are ready to make the trip into Boston for the traditional family breakfast. Reggie announces that she is not going. Dad and Henry leave without her. Shortly after, Reggie and Aaron go to see Eben. Reggie tells Eben about the spiders. Eben attempts to be rational. Aaron brings up a copy of the Journal on his laptop. Eben is angry. Aaron says he had hoped to research the symbols in the book. Aaron says that there has to be a clue in the book somewhere.

Aaron reads voraciously while Eben studies a book on delusional dementia. Aaron learns that the author's name is Macie. According to Macie, the Vours prey upon your fears and turn them into waking nightmares.

Aaron find a passage about Jeremiah turning from a good boy into a mean boy. She also talks about their mother dying and how when the mother died so did a part of Jeremiah. Aaron points out the correlation.

There is a date in the book-May 12, 1972. Shortly the news of the church burning 20 years previous would be in the news. It is decided that they should be able to find the graves and perhaps an address. Eben dislikes the planning intensely but agrees to drive Reggie and Aaron to the cemetery.

Chapter 11: It takes almost an hour to reach the cemetery. Aaron had learned a lot about the incident online.

"On February 2, 1954, one Joseph Garney had set fire to a country church with the priest and a Sunday school class of five trapped inside. Eighteen years later, he died in prison." Chap. 11, p. 97

Eben begins to cough. Reggie tells Eben to stay in the car and keep warm while she and Aaron investigate the cemetery. After searching through many tombstones, Reggie



finds the grave of Joseph Garney. Next to his grave is the grave of Joanna Canfield. The author of the book must be Macie Canfield.

Reggie and Aaron rush back to the car. Eben insists that the search will have to wait until tomorrow; after all it is Christmas. Everything is closed. The friends reluctantly agree.

Chapters 6-11 Analysis

The death of Mrs. Boswell does not seem to affect Henry. In fact, it seems to have had little effect on the family as a whole. Reggie's nightmare is telling in that she has begun to believe that the demons are real. Henry's behavior escalates and becomes dangerous. When confronted by their father Henry echoes Reggie's words. Reggie is furious and confused and also feels betrayed by Henry and her father.

At this point in the story is very clear that something is wrong with Henry. Aaron believes that Henry killed General Squeak. Henry quickly becomes violent. Both Reggie and Aaron are scared.

Although it is clear that something is definitely wrong with Henry, Reggie is in denial, even after she finds General Squeak. Aaron attempts to tell Reggie about the feeling of drowning and the fact that Henry had become burned by the snow. Aaron is frustrated because Reggie refuses to believe him. Aaron attempts to explain why the Vours would take Henry instead of him or Reggie. Eben has little to say on the subject.

Henry continues to act docile in front of Dad. For some reason Henry has turned on Reggie and terrorizes her.

The search for answers begins to get to Reggie somehow. She begins to wonder if Henry is already dead. Finding the cemetery tombstone also helps and gives Aaron and Reggie a lead to finding the author of *The Devouring*. In addition to it being Christmas, Eben seems hesitant to move forward.



Chapters 12-19

Chapters 12-19 Summary

Chapter 12:

"Early the next morning, Reggie's dad didn't yell at her. He didn't speak a word to her. He wouldn't even look at her when she passed him in the kitchen. The sad silence made it unbearable, and she wanted to take his hand in hers, to talk to him, to make him hear the truth." Chap. 12, p. 101

Reggie wishes there is some way that she could reach her father. She needs help but it seems that he is not capable due to his own stresses dealing with the loss of their mother and trying to figure out how to raise the two children on his own.

Reggie goes over to Aaron's house. Aaron begins to scour the internet for clues.

Reggie and Aaron talk to Eben about what they have learned. Eben agrees to take the friends to the Fredericks courthouse to find information on the Canfield family. After a great deal of searching, the friends finally get an address from the postmaster. No mail has been delivered there in years. The search takes them to an abandoned house at the end of a lane. Aaron seems to be the most excited about the quest. Aaron breaks a window against Eben's advice and the trio goes into the house. On the floor are carcasses of birds. Also found is a bloody bat.

Eben continues his coughing spells.

The group searches the house but finds nothing at first. Reggie spots a hinge on the floor and opens the door to the cellar. In a hidden room Reggie finds symbols that relate to those in Macie's journal. Inside the room is the corpse of Jeremiah. Apparently, Macie had entombed Jeremiah in the cellar after he had become ill.

A boy's voice comes from the room as does a wisp of smoke. Reggie begins to get scared. She can see Eben coughing up blood. Reggie knows that the Vour is there and that it is trying to feed on her fears.

Chapter 13:

Reggie goes home. Henry/Vour speaks to Reggie. The Vour says Henry is gone and Reggie cannot save him.

Reggie goes back to the house alone, armed with a fire extinguisher. Reggie knows that the Vours cannot withstand cold and plans to spray Jeremiah's Vour with the extinguisher in hopes of killing it.



Reggie engages the Vour in conversation. It tells her to surrender that she has no hope. Reggie plays along until she can get close enough with the extinguisher. Reggie sprays the Vour.

"It was an abomination unlike any she could have imagined. The thing lay on the floor like a prehistoric fish. It had the semblance of an elongated human torso, but rather than legs, the body tapered down into a fleshy tail. In place of arms, several slimy tentacles protruded from its sides and lay in tangled piles all around it. It had no visible eyes or ears, and where it seemed a head might have been, there was instead a giant round mouth with an iridescent tongue lolling out between rings of black teeth. Lumps and veins covered its oily skin. It reeked like rotting leaves." Chap. 13, p. 138

Reggie thinks it is dead but then it begins to ooze and change into blood red spiders - the thing Reggie fears most. Reggie defies her fears and eats a spider.

Suddenly, the house is set on fire. Reggie manages to get out just before the house is completely destroyed.

Reggie tells Henry about eating the spider. Reggie pushes Henry into the snow and the psychic barrier cracks.

Chapter 14:

Reggie finds herself at a horrific carnival, filled with all of the things Henry is afraid of, including Berzerko the hatchet-handed clown. A boy tells Reggie she is not invited into their domain.

When Reggie comes to, Henry tells her that the Vours will come for her and Aaron.

Chapter 15:

Aaron tends to Reggie's wounds. Reggie sleeps while Aaron searches for more clues. Aaron thinks that eating the spider may have altered Reggie's mind. Reggie can be pulled into her own fearscape. Aaron wonders how the Vours can get into someone's brain.

Smoke pours out of Reggie's shoulder wound. Somehow the wound heals from the inside.

Henry calls to tell Reggie to come home or he will hurt their father.

Aaron and Reggie decide to kidnap Henry and submerge him in the icy Cutter's Lake to get rid of the Vour. Aaron prepares an emergency kit.

Chapter 16:

Reggie is walking down the street when she sees the Kassner twins. The boys harass Reggie until Quinn rescues her. Quinn takes off in his car and admits to Reggie that he



is a Vour. Aaron comes to Reggie's rescue by ramming his mother's SUV into Quinn's car.

Chapter 17:

At the lake, Reggie blames herself for Henry's predicament. Henry manages to escape from Reggie and runs. Quinn arrives and confronts Aaron. Aaron begins to psychically drown. Aaron manages to swim to the surface and conquer the fear.

Reggie catches Henry and drags him to the lake. Reggie drops Henry into the water and blacks out.

Chapter 18:

Reggie returns to the carnival. Children drag her toward the big top until she manages to break free. Reggie runs to the fun house where she is followed by Berzerko. Reggie manages to escape in the hall of mirrors.

Reggie searches for and finds Henry in a nearby cemetery. Henry's coffin turns into an elevator and takes her to a hospital. Monsters bite at Reggie. Reggie escapes through a chute.

Chapter 19:

Aaron manages to break free of Quinn's psychic torture. Aaron pelts ice cubes at Quinn, knowing that Vours do not like the cold. Quinn laughs at Aaron's attempts, saying that he is not as susceptible as Henry; he has had much more time to get used to this new body and to adapt against such trifling things as ice cubes. Still, Aaron is not about to give up as the cold still seems to be the answer. Aaron notices that Quinn is affected by the cold. Aaron manages to get Quinn's shoes off and slices open his feet. Smoke pours from the feet and Quinn shrieks. Aaron runs away.

Aaron runs out onto the ice with the hopes of drowning Quinn and the Vour. Quinn follows after wrapping his feet in cloth. Quinn's Vour is impressed with Aaron's ingenuity but says that Aaron is about to die. The ice begins to crack under Quinn's feet.

Chapters 12-19 Analysis

Reggie and Aaron make a wise move when they decide to include Eben in their plans. Eben prefers to be mysterious. When the friends find out that Eben has long known about the Vours they feel somewhat betrayed and do not understand why Eben chose to keep valuable information from them. There is no explanation given for this behavior and Eben is not questioned further. This may be due in part to the stress of other events but it does seem odd that Eben is allowed to remain secretive about possibly invaluable information that might help Reggie and Aaron defeat the Vours and save Henry.



Henry's personality shifts more often between the sweet little boy that he once was and the malevolent Vour. Henry seems to have a greater purpose than to just torture Reggie and/or harm their father.

Aaron seems to be more excited than scared about the whole adventure.

Reggie's choice to return to the house is certainly a foolish one and one that is likely to emulate the behavior of a teenager. Reggie is hurt when Quinn rejects her and admits that he is a Vour with a purpose.

Reggie has a benefit in not fearing the same things as Henry, which allows her to combat the Vours.

Reggie finding General Squeak and Kappy Koala means that Henry is still trying to hang onto something from his childhood. Reggie believes that if she can help Henry hang on to these small pieces of hope that Henry may be able to be saved from the Vours.

Aaron manages to think quickly despite his fears. Aaron injures Quinn which buys him time. It is clear that there will be a battle to the death on the ice. Aaron works hard to bury his fears.



Chapters 20-25

Chapters 20-25 Summary

Chapter 20:

Reggie continues to think about Henry's fears. General Squeak goes with into the next section off Henry's fears. Reggie exits the elevator into a department store. It is the same department store where their mother used to take them to go shopping before school each year. Reggie cannot understand why Henry would be afraid of the department store. Reggie remembers one time when Henry was very small that he was playing and got separated from her and her mother. Henry was very frightened. Henry was found beneath one of the clothing racks.

As Reggie makes her way through the department store she sees her mother. The mother attempts to get Henry to stay with her. Henry snaps at his mother saying that she left them. The mother becomes angry when Henry refuses to obey. The mother says that the children were selfish and did nothing but take from her so it is no wonder that she left them. Reggie tries to convince Henry that their mother is not real. The mother disappears.

Chapter 21:

The ice continues to crack. Quinn says that he would smash in Aaron's face but that it would take away from his plan. If Aaron drowns it will look like Aaron killed Reggie and then committed suicide. No one would question the scene.

"'Troubled Teen Drowns Girlfriend, Then Self,' Quinn continued. 'Now that's a gripping headline. Cutter's Wedge folks don't get the juicy homicide/suicide stories like the big cities, Cole. You'll be the talk of the town for years!'"

Chap. 21, p. 209

Aaron and Quinn fight. Quinn falls into the water but grabs Aaron's ankle and begins to drag him into the lake.

Reggie tells Henry not to be afraid. Reggie and Henry run from the department store.

Chapter 22:

Aaron spots headlights on the shore. The headlights from his mother's SUV had died. There is darkness until another vehicle arrives. Aaron sees Eben.

Chapter 23:



Reggie and Henry rise into the grave at the top of the hill. They manage to dig their way free through worms and maggots. Reggie and Henry climb out of the grave and return to the carnival.

Henry and Reggie's mother also rises from the grave and taunts Henry. The little boy in Henry wants to respond to his mother even though he knows she is a Vour.

Reggie tells Henry that their mother did not survive because she was not brave enough. Henry talks about being scared. Reggie assures Henry that he is brave.

Reggie and Henry run through the fearscape. Children taunt them. Reggie manages to pull Henry along and not to lose him in the fear, even when Berzerko appears. Reggie continues to blame herself for scaring Henry with scary stories.

Reggie asks Henry where he entered the carnival/fearscape. The pair runs toward the entrance and returns to reality.

Chapter 24:

Aaron must figure out a way to save Reggie and Henry. Quinn tells Aaron that their bodies must not separate or the psychic link will be broken and they will be lost forever. Aaron continues to struggle with Quinn but is being pulled closer to the hole in the ice.

Eben goes out onto the ice and snares Aaron's belt with his cane. The belt, which Quinn had been holding onto, falls away and Quinn disappears under the ice.

Chapter 25:

Henry wakes up. Reggie is still in contact with Henry so both are safe. Henry's hands and feet seem to be turning black. No one knows if this is from the death of the Vour or from frostbite. Aaron gets the emergency kit and they wrap Henry's hands and feet in dry towels and also put the hot water bottle on his chest.

Eben invents a story about the kids going to see the Pleiades and falling into the water. Eben says he will get rid of Quinn's car; Eben has a lot of experience making things and people disappear.

Aaron thinks about Quinn. Although Quinn had turned into a Vour, Aaron thinks about the real Quinn and how he did not deserve to die that way.

At the hospital, Reggie asks Aaron to contact her father. It seems that Henry is going to be all right.

Chapters 20-25 Analysis

Aaron must face his most difficult fear - the act of drowning. Quinn knows this is how to torture Aaron and believes that it will cause Aaron to give up, to surrender. Aaron,



however, manages to find some unknown inner strength - perhaps because he knows he must save Reggie and Henry - and fights against the drowning sensation in his mind. Quinn is surprised and impressed but not deterred by Aaron's newfound bravery.

Quinn explains to Aaron that he has been a Vour for a long time and has become accustomed to living inside a human body. Henry is much weaker and is much more affected by cold and other things because he is not used to this new body. The tolerance will come with time. Aaron says he plans to save Henry. The fact that a Vour can go unrecognized is a scary one and Aaron wonders who else might be a Vour.

Reggie seems to be much braver when she is saving Henry from his fears. Reggie manages to keep cool under pressure and to explain to her younger brother that their mother is not real. Henry makes a huge leap toward maturity when he says goodbye to their mother.

It is surprising that Quinn reveals the fact that Reggie and Henry must not lose contact or their minds will be destroyed. It gives the enemy inside information which is used to save them.

Eben's appearance, like most of his behaviors and history, remain unexplained. Eben lets on that he has been around for a long time and has somehow defeated at least one Vour. There are many more Vours but Eben does not expand on that. Once again, Eben remains shrouded in mystery, leaving room for a cliffhanger and a sequel.

Reggie takes charge again and for once seems to be confident and content in her role as Henry's surrogate mother.

The reader is left to believe that the Vours will rise again.



Characters

Vours

Vours are entities that attack people through their fears and steal their souls. They are only able to do this on Sorry Night, the night of the Winter Solstice. Reggie is introduced to the concept of Vours through the journal written by Macie Canfield. Reggie is fascinated but does not believe in the creatures until she notices that Henry has begun to change into something evil.

The Vours can make a person see and feel the most horrible things - in Reggie's case this means being attacked by spiders. In Henry's case, it means being chased by the hatchet-handed clown Berzerko as well as a number of other horrors that are detailed in his fearscape.

Reggie finally sees the Vours in their true form in the Canfield house:

"It was an abomination unlike any she could have imagined. The thing lay on the floor like a prehistoric fish. It had the semblance of an elongated human torso, but rather than legs, the body tapered down into a fleshy tail. In place of arms, several slimy tentacles protruded from its sides and lay in tangled piles all around it. It had no visible eyes or ears, and where it seemed a head might have been, there was instead a giant round mouth with an iridescent tongue lolling out between rings of black teeth. Lumps and veins covered its oily skin. It reeked like rotting leaves." Chap. 13, p. 138

It seems that the Vours can only be killed by the cold although there is no proof.

Regina Maria Halloway

Regina Maria Halloway is a fifteen year old girl. Reggie has a best friend, Aaron Cole, who is brainy, gangly and a bit off the wall. The pair is inseparable.

Reggie must help to take care of her house since her mother disappeared almost a year ago. This means that Reggie must do the housework, cook, and care for her eight year old brother, Henry. Reggie resents this extra work and longs to have more time to herself. In addition to the housework, Reggie works at Something Wicked, a bookstore owned by the mysterious Eben Bloch.

Reggie and Aaron are horror buffs. They have read every book and seen every movie that is attached to the horror genre. Reggie shares her passion with Henry, which is where the trouble begins.

Reggie attends Cutter High School. Reggie comments that her life is boring, that if it were a movie she would play an extra. She is not popular or unpopular. Reggie has a crush on the school's football hero, Quinn Waters.



Reggie grows tremendously throughout the book, taking on more responsibility and showing brains and fortitude by trying to save her little brother and return things to normal.

Eben Bloch

Eben Bloch is the owner of Something Wicked, a book store. Eben is also Reggie's boss.

Aaron Cole

Aaron Cole is Reggie's best friend and partner in crime.

Henry Halloway

Henry Halloway is Reggie's little brother and victim of a Vour

Macie Canfield

Macie Canfield is the author of the Journal.

Jeremiah Canfield

Jeremiah Canfield is Macie's brother and victim of the first known (reported) Vour.

Thom Halloway

Thom Halloway is Reggie and Henry's father.

Amy Halloway

Amy Halloway is Reggie and Henry's mother.

Quinn Waters

Quinn Waters is Reggie's crush and the Vour that tries to kill Reggie and Aaron.



Objects/Places

Fearscape

The fearscape is a place in one's brain where all fears are present and seemingly real. In order to defeat the Vours one must become brave and overcome fear in order to escape and be safe. There are many different fears and fearscapes presented in the book.

Reggie's fearscapes typically involve spiders. Reggie is terrified of spiders and the Vours use that against her. Another fear Reggie has is something happening to Eben or Henry. Aaron has a fear of drowning since he experienced an incident as a child.

Henry's fears are detailed since he is the one who is fighting for his life. His fears include scenes from horror movies and stories. Berzerko the hatchet-handed clown is one of Henry's great fears. Berzerko appears at a carnival where children are mutilated and Henry is chased. Henry also has many fears surrounding his mother. She comes back to him in his fearscape, coaxing him to come to her. When Henry does not obey, the mother becomes vicious, revealing her Vour self.

Each person must find a way to overcome fear, at least enough to be able to leave the fearscape and have a fighting chance at conquering the Vours. In Henry's case, Reggie manages to find a way into his fearscape and to rescue him.

Something Wicked

Something Wicked is the bookstore in which Reggie works. It is owned by Eben Bloch, a mysterious older man. The bookstore does most of its business online so there are few customers in the store. The store is in serious disarray with things strewn everywhere. However, Eben seems to know exactly how to find any item.

Something Wicked is a haven for Reggie, particularly since her mother left. In addition to giving her access to her mentor, Eben, it allows Reggie to be surrounded with books in her favorite genre - horror.

It is at Something Wicked that Reggie finds the journal written by Macie Canfield.

Cutter's Wedge

Cutter's Wedge is the name of the town where the characters live.



Cutter's Lake

This is the place where Quinn drowns.

Canfield House

This is the house that belongs to Macie and Jeremiah Canfield.

Cutter Wedge High School

This is where Reggie and Aaron attend school.

Halloway House

This is Reggie's house.

Cole House

This is Aaron's house.

Journal

This is the item written by Macie Canfield.

Carnival

This is a macabre place where Berzerko the clown chases Reggie and Henry.



Themes

Vours

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The Vours can make a person see and feel the most horrible things - in Reggie's case this means being attacked by spiders. In Henry's case, it means being chased by the hatchet-handed clown Berzerko as well as a number of other horrors that are detailed in his fearscape.

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Fear

Fear is the main theme in the story. It is fear that allows the Vours to latch onto someone, to enter his brain and to take over his body. As a way of trapping a person, the person is led into a fearscape where all fears are real and terrifying. Each person's fears are different and some are seemingly impossible to defeat.

Reggie's fears typically involve spiders. Reggie is terrified of spiders and the Vours use that against her. Another fear Reggie has is something happening to Eben or Henry. Aaron has a fear of drowning since he experienced an incident as a child.

Henry's fears are detailed since he is the one who is fighting for his life. His fears include scenes from horror movies and stories. Berzerko the hatchet-handed clown is one of Henry's great fears. Berzerko appears at a carnival where children are mutilated and Henry is chased. Henry also has many fears surrounding his mother. She comes back to him in his fearscape, coaxing him to come to her. When Henry does not obey, the mother becomes vicious, revealing her Vour self.



Each person must find a way to overcome fear, at least enough to be able to leave the fearscape and have a fighting chance at conquering the Vours. In Henry's case, Reggie manages to find a way into his fearscape and to rescue him.

Bravery

Bravery is the other side of fear. Reggie learns that in order to beat the Vours and to rescue Henry, she has to be brave, no matter how frightened she is while in her fearscape. Reggie must face her fear of spiders and does so by eating one in the face of the Vour that is Jeremiah Canfield. Aaron must learn to face his all consuming fear of drowning, a difficult task considering that the Vour can make it seem as if it is truly happening.

Reggie tries to explain bravery to Henry when he is struggling against his own fears. Henry and Reggie are confronted by their mother. Henry is very confused about their mother until Reggie explains that she is a Vour. Their real mother was not brave enough to stand up to the Vours and succumbed.

One of the bravest people in the story is Eben, although his story is never told. At the end of the story it becomes apparent that Eben is an old soul who has battled Vours before and will do so again. Eben is brave enough to be able to face a Vour and to defeat it.

Style

Point of View

The point of view used in *The Devouring* by Simon Holt is third person omniscient. This point of view works well throughout the book since there are several components and underlying factors that would not be revealed otherwise. The story itself is rather complex and only third person omniscient would allow the reader to follow and understand the activities of all of the characters as well as the dangerous and deadly events involving the life of Macie Canfield, Reggie, Henry, Aaron and the Vours. It also allows for the reader to follow and understand actions and thoughts of other characters in the book as well as those events of which one single character has no knowledge.

Although it is in third person the author does an excellent job of revealing each character's fears and relaying them through the fearscape.

While the first person point of view might have been interesting when coming from the characters in their time of confusion and abject terror, third person conveys the entire story and not just the subjective opinions of the characters. It also permits the reader to take part in the journey and development of each character in the story.

Setting

The fearscape is a place in one's brain where all fears are present and seemingly real. In order to defeat the Vours one must become brave and overcome fear in order to escape and be safe. There are many different fears and fearsapes presented in the book.

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Language and Meaning

The language and meaning used in *The Devouring* by Simon Holt reflects the times in which the story is set. While there is no precise date given for the main part of the story, the reader can assume that it is in a modern time since many modern conveniences and activities are referenced, along with the use of language. At first the writing in the journal does not give an exact time period but offers clues to the reader that might help to pinpoint a general era. Later, Aaron discovers the date of the church burning and is able to relate it to the deaths of the school children as well as the possession of Jeremiah Canfield.

The time periods dictate the language but not in such a way as to make the language difficult for the reader. The language used is common but Holt uses it in such a way that the common language used reflects the times and proper behavior of the characters.

Holt is a master of language and is not afraid to exercise her vocabulary. There is a marked absence of sex, violence, and vulgarity throughout the stories and it is rare to see any use of profanity. This may be due to the fact that this is a young adult book and the use of those items was not commonplace in the time.

Structure

The Devouring by Simon Holt is a work of fiction. The work is chronological in nature. It is comprised of 231 pages, broken into 25 chapters and a prologue. The shortest chapter is four pages in length; the longest chapter is 11 pages in length; the average number of pages per chapter is nine pages.

The story begins with a prologue from the point of view of young Macie Canfield. Macie's younger brother is being punished for not putting the cows in the barn. Their drunkard father hangs Jeremiah from the scarecrow pole in the field as a punishment. Jeremiah is afraid and is soon attacked by the Vours, a group of entities that feed on one's fears.

The story shifts to 15-year-old Regina Holloway reading a story to her eight- eight-year old brother Henry. Reggie loves horror stories and shares them with Henry who often becomes frightened. Reggie and her mother had shared the same bond and Reggie wants to carry on the tradition, especially now since their mother has disappeared.

Reggie and her best friend Aaron are horror buffs. The heart of the story begins when Reggie finds a journal written by Macie Canfield, a local woman whose brother had been attacked by Vours. Reggie and Aaron are fascinated by the tale but certainly do not believe it. Things change drastically when Reggie and Aaron summon the Vours. The Vours do not attack Reggie or Aaron but rather the young Henry, who is much more susceptible to the fear.

Reggie and Aaron must find answers regarding the Vours and discover a way to save Henry from eternal doom.



Quotes

"Since Mom had left him without so much as a goodbye kiss almost a year ago, taking only a packed suitcase and a photo album, Reggie had been forced to assume a number of extra duties around the house." Chap. 1, p. 5

"Reggie discovered the book contained a bizarre, handwritten narrative of monsters called 'Vours' that could take over people's bodies and minds when they were most frightened. But according to the author, they could only do this one night a year, on Sorry Night, the night of the Winter Solstice." Chap. 1, p. 6

"Right then, Reggie realized she was to witness a historic event." Chap. 2, p. 16

"For Reggie, the shower had always been a sanctuary. All her senses felt different here." Chap. 4, p. 37

"Something Wicked seemed to materialize as a safe haven for Reggie in the year before Mom left, when things between her parents were strained at best and explosive at worst. Mom's behavior became increasingly strange and secretive; Dad's turned angry and suspicious." Chap. 5, p. 43

"It's just the diary of some crazy old kook, Eben. She writes about these monsters called the Vours that attack humans when they're most afraid - like, can't-speak-or-blink-or-breathe afraid. They take over your body and send your consciousness to some demonic hell, then they live your life out. And they look and act like regular humans, so it's impossible to tell who's a Vour and who's not." Chap. 5, p. 49

"On the Winter Solstice night, shun your fears. Bury them. I know it. I saw it. They'll take your soul." Chap. 5, p. 49

"With an ungodly screech, the demons crashed through the window, taloned hands outstretched, and knocked Reggie into the Christmas tree." Chap. 6, p. 59

"They'd fought countless times before; argued, yelled, wrestled, argued, slapped, smacked. Henry had tattled, baited, blamed, annoyed, meddled, and eavesdropped on her like any little brother. But he'd never lied. Not until last night." Chap. 7, p. 66

"Reggie lay perfectly still on the snow, warm blood passing from her nose and staining the whiteness around her." Chap. 7, p. 76

"He rolled down his window, and Reggie could smell his anger." Chap. 8, p. 82

"A mass of scrambling legs and dripping fangs poured down the wall and flooded onto the floor like a dark boiling slime." Chap. 9, p. 86



"Early the next morning, Reggie's dad didn't yell at her. He didn't speak a word to her. He wouldn't even look at her when she passed him in the kitchen. The sad silence made it unbearable, and she wanted to take his hand in hers, to talk to him, to make him hear the truth." Chap. 12, p. 101