

# THE SHADOWS OF ROOKHAVEN

Pádraig Kenny

Illustrated by Edward Bettison

Macmillan Children's Books

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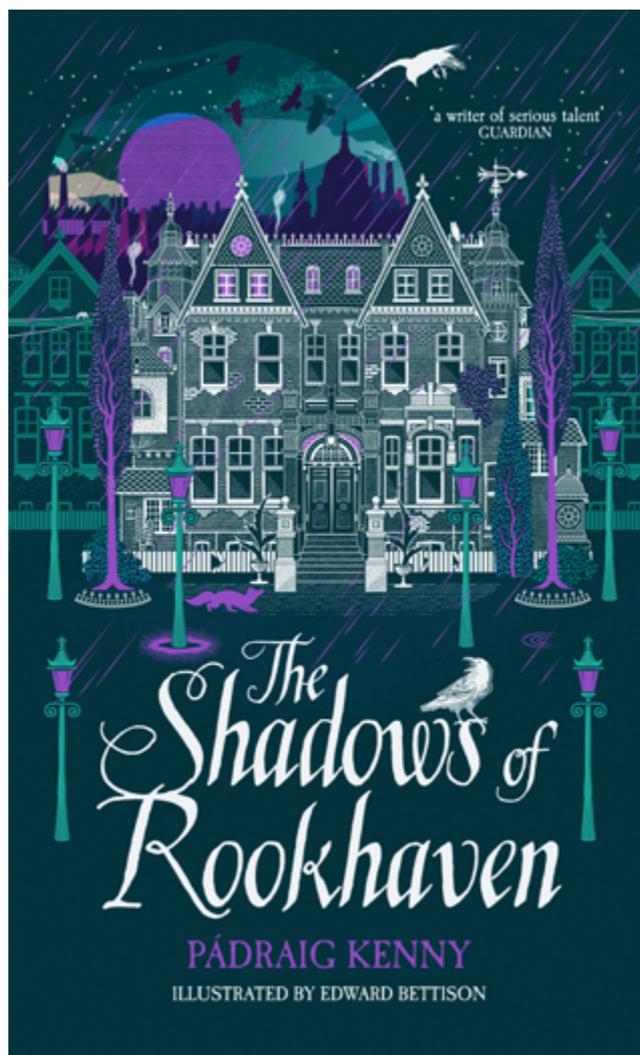
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## Themes

- Family
- Belonging
- Alienation
- Difference
- Identity
- Grief
- Community
- Forgiveness
- Memory
- History

**Summary** This sequel to *The Monsters of Rookhaven* opens in the lead-up to the Great Configuration, a cosmic event that occurs only once every hundred years. Rookhaven becomes the central point for the celebration, as members of the Family begin to gather. Mirabelle has never seen a Configuration before and she looks forward to a moment of communion with the people she cares about most in the world. But all is not well in Rookhaven. Old friends are in trouble and one of the guests is hiding a dangerous secret that will test Mirabelle's resolve and shake the foundations of the Family that means so much to her.

**Judges' Comments** As monsters from all over the country descend on Rookhaven for the Great Configuration, an event that only takes place once every hundred years, Mirabelle senses that she is being treated as an outsider. Meanwhile Billy appears at the mansion, intending to bring chaos and destruction. Billy and Mirabelle soon realise that they must team up if they are to protect those they love. Kenny's brilliant second book about Rookhaven is wonderfully paced story – with truly excellent illustrations by Bettison – exploring ideas of loss, difference, forgiveness, family and friendship.



**About the Author** Pádraig Kenny is from County Kildare, now living in Limerick. Previously an arts journalist, a teacher and a library assistant, he now writes full-time. His first novel, *Tin*, was a Waterstones Book of the Month and was nominated for the Carnegie Medal, as well as being shortlisted for the Irish Book Awards and several regional awards. *The Monsters of Rookhaven* received the Honour Award for Fiction at the KPMG Children's Books Ireland Awards. He is married with four children.

**About the Illustrator** Edward Bettison is a graphic designer and illustrator from East Yorkshire in England. His twin interests of skateboarding and music introduced him to a huge variety of commercial art and artists from a young age. This inspired him to study graphic design at Nottingham Trent University. He then worked in London in the music industry before moving into the publishing world. He is now a freelance illustrator and book designer who specialises in highly detailed illustrations. He lives in Brighton with his partner and son.

# QUESTIONS

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. This book is a sequel. What does that mean to you? Have you read the first book? Do you think it will matter whether you have or not?
2. Look at the cover – do you think it's old-fashioned? Does it give you a clue what the story might be about?
3. Does the illustrator's style remind you of anything? Does it make you think of a specific period in history?
4. Look carefully again at the cover – what do you see? Think about the elements present in the cover illustration – is anything conspicuous by its absence?
5. The house is called Rookhaven – do you think that means it's a safe place for rooks? What do you know about these birds? Do you know any stories or fairy tales about them?

## AS YOU READ

### Part One: Billy and the Worms

1. Do you recognise the book Billy is reading? Why do you think he might need to read books to escape his situation?
2. What does the word 'covenant' mean? Why do you think the Worms might have been punished for breaking it? Have you heard the word used in any other context?
3. 'A pretend family wasn't a real family, but pretending was better than nothing.' Do you agree with this quote? Why do you think Billy needs a pretend family?
4. What do you know about the Blitz? What would the city of London have looked like shortly after this event? Do you think it might be an easy place for Billy and his family to hide in?
5. Why do you think Billy stops to look at the family as they go through their evening routine? Do you think he's 'spying'?
6. Do you think Billy and Meg are different from the Catchpoles? Why do you think the men chasing Billy are so intent on catching him, even if it means hurting him?
7. What does Billy's grief for the Catchpoles say about the nature of family?

### Part Two: The Misbegotten

1. What do you think the Great Configuration might be?
2. Think about the Dibbles. Just because they don't have

eyes, it doesn't mean they can't see perfectly well. What do you think this says about the idea of appearances in the book?

3. What does Aunt Mavis mean by saying Mirabelle is 'different'? Is her gesture of cleaning her hands after touching Mirabelle significant?
4. If you've read the first book, what do you remember about Gideon? Has he changed?
5. What do you think about Mirabelle and Dr Ellenby's relationship? She clearly cares about his health. Why does she tell him that she's mortal too?
6. Think about what Dr Ellenby says about human beings growing and changing. What do you think has happened to Jem to explain why she hasn't written to Mirabelle in months? If Dr Ellenby's health is declining, how do you think this makes Mirabelle feel? And why do you think Odd doesn't want to see the doctor?
7. What do you think about the way that different chapters focus on a different character's perspective? Does it give you a balanced view of the narrative?
8. Think about Billy's arrival at Rookhaven. He feels at home yet lost at the same time. Can you understand why? Why would Mirabelle's concern for him take him by surprise?
9. Why do you think Billy hits Odd? Why would his instinct be to lash out like that?
10. Billy feels like he's different too. Is this the same feeling that Mirabelle has? He calls himself and Meg outcasts. What does that mean? Have you come across that word before?
11. Mirabelle is thinking about Billy, about the hunted look that he has. Does he remind her of herself? What kind of person do you think Mirabelle is?
12. Why do you think Piglet's pages are black? What else is different about Piglet's pages in the book? Why do you think he's noticed Billy's presence in the house?
13. Billy clearly relies on instinct and his physical strength to survive. Can you understand why he feels so angry when Gideon steals his satchel? Angry enough to fling himself at Gideon and smash through the window?
14. Aunt Mavis and some of the other Family members clearly don't like Billy or Mirabelle. Why is this? Do you think some members of the Family think differently to those that live in Rookhaven, like Odd, Uncle Enoch and Aunt Eliza?
15. Mavis declares that Billy has come to Rookhaven under false pretences – but Mirabelle points out that he was allowed to pass through the Glamour and the flowers didn't stop him coming to the house. Why do you think that is significant? Why do you think Mirabelle wants to advocate for Billy?

16. Aunt Mavis mentions the Misbegotten. What do you make of Uncle Enoch's and Aunt Eliza's reactions?
17. What is the difference between Within and Beyond? How is Mirabelle perceived in both of these contexts?
18. Mavis talks about confirming Billy's heritage. What do you take the word 'heritage' to mean? What do you think Mavis means by it?
19. Billy tells Eliza that he had 'nowhere else to go'. Do you think this is true? If, as Gideon says, Billy is 'like' Mirabelle, does this mean that he's not on his own?
20. Think about the language of home in the book. Billy says Rookhaven is welcoming because of Mirabelle. Here, Eliza tells him to make himself at home. Do you think Rookhaven is a good place for him to be, regardless of why he was sent there?
21. Think about how Odd uses his portals to move through different spaces. Do you think he's running away from something? Why won't he visit Dr Ellenby?
22. Think about how Billy interacts with the space around Rookhaven. How has he been used to living in London? What kind of spaces he is used to?
23. Why do you think it's hard for Billy to hear that Lucius thinks he's a friend? Or that Mirabelle is a good judge of character?
24. Billy has been pretending all his life, trying to blend in and be something he's not. Has Mirabelle been doing the same? Why are they nearly more than family, as she says?
25. Piglet can sense that Odd is frightened. Why do you think Piglet has trouble following Mirabelle's words? Is Piglet different too?
26. Billy senses the danger before anyone else. Can you understand why he tries to run?
27. Did you expect Piglet to be a small boy with eyes that keep changing colour? What other form did you think he might take?
28. Mirabelle has clearly been teaching Piglet to occupy different forms. Why do you think she and Odd picked the form of a small child for him to inhabit? Even within the house, he's clearly separated from other members of the Rookhaven family. Why do you think everyone is so afraid of Piglet?
29. Only two people seem to be able to control themselves in front of Piglet, albeit for different reasons. Why are Billy and Winthrop so transfixed by him?
30. Think about the exchange Enoch and Mirabelle have about the idea of controlling Piglet. Do you understand what they both mean, from their different perspectives?
31. Why do you think Piglet's pages are written in the present tense? Why does the word 'tomorrow' mean nothing to Piglet?
32. Odd asks Mirabelle why she's teaching Piglet to behave outside of his room. What do you make of her response? Do you think it's a personal issue for her, making sure that Piglet is part of the Family in all senses of the word? What do you think Odd's 'wrong reasons' might be?
33. How significant do you think it is that Piglet places his hand on Mirabelle's head as she cries over Dr Ellenby, even though he doesn't know why?

### Part Three: The Configuration

1. At Dr Ellenby's funeral, Mirabelle meets Freddie, an old friend. She thinks about the village boys she has watched growing up – do you think it's hard for Mirabelle, watching others change as she doesn't?
2. Why do you think Mirabelle is so angry with Odd?
3. Why is Dr Ellenby's pipe so important to Mirabelle?
4. Think about the conversation that unfolds in the garden about mortal traditions surrounding death. Why do you think the members of the Family who are not from Rookhaven can't seem to understand what it means to be human?
5. Enoch sanctions Mirabelle because she has harmed another member of the Family. Have you come across this idea of sanctioning before?
6. It's too much effort for Odd to put recent events into words – can you understand why? Do characters often have trouble expressing themselves and articulating their feelings in the book?
7. In his interaction with Winthrop, Odd declares that, out of all of them, Mirabelle understands the true meaning of family best. Do you agree?
8. Mirabelle attempts to articulate her grief to Piglet. Why is losing Dr Ellenby different to losing her mother?
9. Do you think Piglet thinks about history? Do you think Piglet understands what is happening to the people in Rookhaven? Or does time move differently for him? Why?
10. Can you understand why Odd struggles to articulate the meaning behind the Configuration to Gideon? Why do you think this insight into the Ether is so important to everyone gathered in Rookhaven – and why does this make Rookhaven itself so important?

**Part Four: Piglet in the World**

1. Think about Billy's actions in the aftermath of his using the orb to capture Piglet. What do his feelings about what he's done say about the kind of character he is?
2. Do you agree with Mirabelle's assessment of Winthrop? Is being old in the novel always connected with knowledge?
3. What happens to Billy when Piglet moves towards him? Why do you think Piglet shows him other memories?
4. After Billy runs away – which confuses Piglet – Piglet starts thinking about emotions, about love and guilt. What does he learn from Billy's memories? When he decides to stay in the world a little longer, what do you think this might mean?
5. Think about what Winthrop says when he makes the case for trying to find Billy first – because the boy must be questioned to ascertain why he breached the sanctuary of Rookhaven. The way Winthrop describes the isolation and alienation that a Misbegotten might feel because they are different, because they are not allowed to belong – do you think that might be a metaphor or an allusion to something else?
6. Do you think Mirabelle is right to rely on her instincts when it comes to Billy?
7. Why do you think Piglet's memories are so scattered? Do you think Piglet has any sense of who he is, who he has been in the past for so long? What do you think of Piglet?

**Part Five: The Pied Raven**

1. 'Skulking in your big house while the world moves on around you? You lot aren't family.' What do you think Thorne means by this?
2. Is Odd's revelation that he can travel not only in space but also in time important? He uses the word 'refuge' to describe the quiet place he takes Winthrop to to escape. Why do you think he calls it this?
3. Winthrop uses the phrase 'arcane magic' to describe the things Thorne has done. What does this mean? Have you come across the phrase before?
4. As she escapes from her clamps, Mirabelle briefly contemplates leaving Billy behind. Why do you think she doesn't? Do you think they are more alike than she would care to admit?
5. 'Why is the magic boy crying?' Why do you think Piglet is crying, even though he is unaware of the effect he's had on the people on the platform?

**Part Six: The Vulsifier**

1. What do you think of Mr Thorne's story – a member of the Family who hunts those members who break the covenant? Do you feel sympathy for him?
2. Mirabelle remembers something Uncle Enoch once told her about Piglet, despite his age, being 'little more than a child'. Do you think that's true? And why should it matter? Does it diminish Piglet's capacity for empathy?
3. Think about the moment Piglet walks into the machine. Why do you think he does it? What is he thinking about in the moment of the separation? Who does he think of? And why?

**Part Seven: Endings**

1. 'We're Misbegotten – we die. You should accept that. I have.' Do you think that's true? As Mirabelle says this to Aspinall, as his true face is revealed, do you think she really has accepted her mortality?
2. When Thorne pulls the lever on the Vulsifier and Mirabelle tries to stop him, who do you think she is trying to save?
3. When the sharing of thoughts and memories that Piglet facilitates is over, he realises that everyone is afraid, albeit for different reasons. Do you understand the fears Piglet sees?
4. Why doesn't Thorne go back to Rookhaven with them, even though Mirabelle asks him to?
5. Why is it important that Mirabelle and Odd walk back to Rookhaven after visiting Dr Davenport?
6. Do you think Odd will go to visit Marcus Ellenby again?

## AFTER YOU HAVE READ

1. Think about each of these words in relation to the main characters in the book. Do you think of different meanings and implications for each character?
  - Family
  - Difference
  - Identity
  - Grief
  - Community
  - Forgiveness
  - Mortality
  - Empathy
  - Misbegotten
2. Think about the way the narrative is structured. Does it start slowly, introducing you to characters, or does it expect you to deal with a swift pace immediately? When do you think the action starts to ramp up? Does the switch in tempo work well?
3. Aunt Mavis's motto is 'Elegance above all else'. Do you agree with this? If you had a motto, what might it be?
4. If you could design a machine that could do anything, what kind of machine would you design?
5. The book is set in the years after the Second World War – the mentions of the Blitz indicate this. Why do you think the outside world seems so far away from Rookhaven?

## ACTIVITIES

- Who is your favourite character and why? Rewrite a key scene from the book from your character's perspective.
- Take each of the illustrations as a sequence and write a story about them, using only the images you can see. Is it different to the story in the book? What does this tell you about the relationship between the text and the illustrations?
- Write a story about one of the destinations Odd's portals take him to. Who does he meet there? What does he do?
- Keep thinking about the word 'difference'. How is it used in the book? How do Mirabelle and Billy experience difference? What does it mean for their lives? What about Piglet – what does it mean for him? What does being different mean for you? What does it mean in our world?
- Write the letter that Mirabelle is composing to Jem in the final chapter, telling her the most important things that have happened in the story.

- The author includes a dedication – if you were going to write a book, who would you dedicate it to and why? Write your dedication!
- This is a story about monsters but it's also a story about shadows. In order to have shadows, we must have both light and dark. Can you think of a fairy tale or a fable that talks about hope in the face of adversity or gives us a sense that our individual actions matter? Why do we tell stories like these?

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- Check out illustrator Edward Bettison's webpage for *The Shadows of Rookhaven*: <https://edwardbettison.com/the-shadows-of-rookhaven>
- Read *The Monsters of Rookhaven*, also previously shortlisted and by the same author, then avail of the Children's Books Ireland resource pack: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/resources-ideas/ideas-activities-packs/junior-juries-resource-pack-and-artist-videos-2021>
- If you enjoyed reading this book, you might like some of the books on these themed Children's Books Ireland reading lists.
  - Adventure Stories: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/adventure-stories>
  - Celebrating Difference: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/celebrating-difference>
  - Celebrating Families: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/celebrating-families>
  - Difficult Changes: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/difficult-changes>
  - Fantasy: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/fantasy>
  - Folklore, Myth, Legend: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/folklore-myth-legend>
  - Overcoming Fears: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/overcoming-fears>