**Steven Poole is intrigued by the warping of space in House of Leaves.**

**House of Leaves**  
Mark Z Danielewski

Borges once explained in an interview that he often had ideas for esoteric books, which, however, he could not bring himself to write. Instead, he would pretend the books already existed, and write fictions around them. As a cunning footnoted allusion in this novel to Borges's story "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" reveals, Mark Danielewski has stolen the idea and built an enormous, scholarly-gothic fiction around a non-existent film.

The film, The Navidson Record, is a documentary made by Will Navidson, a photojournalist who has forsaken war zones in order to repair his marriage. Together with his wife Karen and their two children, Navidson moves into a pretty house in the country and sets up Hi-8 cameras in every room, thinking to make a homely family record. But everything is not as it seems. While working on the house one day, Navidson discovers that it measures three quarters of an inch longer on the inside than on the outside.

Navidson calls friends and borrows tools to try to eliminate the illusion, but it persists. And then, between two adjoining rooms, there opens up an impossible 10-foot hallway, black and icy. There is something very wrong. The Navidson Record becomes a vérité horror film as Will and his friends try to explore the anomalous space, which rearranges itself periodically with a roar, and expands into terrifying volumes of darkness.

The main text of House of Leaves is written by an old man, Zampanò, who became obsessed with the film on its limited public release. As well as a long exegesis of the film's narrative, Zampanò conducts a thorough synthesis of the mountain of scholarly and critical material that has grown up around the film, making use of published interviews with the surviving protagonists and carefully considering feminist, post-structuralist, Freudian, Jungian, deconstructionist and purely cinéaste-aesthetic readings of The Navidson Record.

Danielewski thus weaves around his brutally efficient and genuinely chilling story a delightful and often very funny satire of academic criticism. In one way, and after the manner of Moby-Dick, the novel is its own Leviathan commentary (Danielewski even collects a Melvillean encyclopaedia of quotations about houses in one of the book's voluminous appendices). Every possible mythological and literary analysis of the story of Navidson's house is already provided in the text, but the house's impossibly vast, dark interior spaces, like the White Whale, finally shrug off all projected interpretation. Yet even that is not enough: Danielewski piles on even more narrative frames, ultimately to the novel's detriment.

Writing footnotes to Zampanò's footnotes is a young apprentice LA tattooist called Johnny Truant, who finds the old man's box of papers after he dies and decides to turn them into a publishable book (occasionally Truant's own words are mediated through a final scholarly lens, that of "The Editors"). Truant notes the baffling fact