



Big Woods

May Cobb

Midnight Ink (Jul 8, 2018)

Softcover \$15.99 (312pp)

978-0-7387-5781-0

Keds, neon, Aqua Net, and Satanic Panic: *Big Woods* is a satisfying, pulpy mash-up of pop culture references and classic horror. By turns spooky and super sentimental, the novel encapsulates the high emotions of adolescence and the spiritual anxiety that permeated the late 1980s.

After her younger sister Lucy disappears, Leah Spencer starts to think that she may have been kidnapped by a devil-worshipping cult; Lucy isn't the first child to go missing in Longview, Texas.

As Leah searches for her sister, she unravels a decades-old mystery. Against her parents' wishes, she goes deeper and deeper into Big Woods, where street signs "dangle from their metal rusty poles like loose teeth." Leah is led by uncanny, supernatural messages that appear in her dreams, on her family's Commodore 64 screen, and even in the dots on her Lite Brite. Her connection to Lucy is at the core of *Big Woods*, and it enlivens this story of small-town horror.

Big Woods alternates between Leah's viewpoint and the perspective of Sylvia, an older woman who blames herself for the missing children. The characters' voices are distinct and provide valuable insight into the mystery. Nail-biting scenes build on one another, adding details that build tension.

The novel's plot is well twisted, and author May Cobb draws out terrifying moments with clarity. Some chapters feel rushed, however, pushing the story so hard that there's not enough time for new information to sink in. Sylvia's role seems to be primarily to provide backstory: as a character, she's the equivalent of a newspaper clipping or a found diary. As the story lines overlap more, the novel begins to feel fleshed out, less two dimensional.

Big Woods is perfectly timed to take advantage of the 1980s horror revival. Its historic details are excellent, down to the songs on Leah's car stereo. Cobb paints in Day-Glo and brings terrors of the night to life.

CLAIRE FOSTER (July/August 2018)

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