



## Black Oak: The Loveless Chronicles: Chapter 1

**Titus Murphy**

Cosby Media Productions

(267pp)

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*In the fantasy novel Black Oak, citizens across two eras reckon with strange creatures among them.*

Sightings of shadowy creatures haunt the citizens of a Kansas suburb in Titus Murphy's fantasy novel *Black Oak*.

In the early 1800s, a bloody battle is waged among hunters, witches, and jackals. Sam, a hunter, is initiated into the battle when he kills a riff, a vampire-wolf hybrid, and learns about the proliferation of beasts with supernatural powers in his region. The riffs, meanwhile, seek a treasure that's hidden among the hunters and witches.

In the present day, Mark, a long-haul truck driver, is in love with Sharon, a beautiful woman who works at a local store. An eventful haul down in Texas leads to a weird animal sighting, but it also gives Mark the courage to ask Sharon out. But in a nearby town, sightings of teenagers cloaked in outdated clothing spark rumors, and alleged attacks by beasts put the citizens on alert, threatening to expose the past.

Though the novel is set both in the past and the present, its focus is most on Mark's timeline. Mark and Sharon's relationship is developed, as is Mark's strained relationship with his friend Ron. The nineteenth-century events cast a pall over these residents in particular. But despite the supernatural concerns, human concerns take precedent, including the complications of love, jealousy between friends, and the return of a troubled family members. As the cast grapples with these complications, the specter of the past battles intrudes, suggesting a coming resumption of hostilities; in this first series title, though, those hostilities grow most in the background.

Exchanges between Sam and his friends are friendly at first, but become angst ridden as the danger posed by the riffs becomes more apparent. When the book shifts to Mark's story line, Sam and his friends are put on hold; the novel leaves them in a precarious state, their fates unknown.

Mark's story progresses in a structured manner; it's full of interesting characters who hold attention. Within it, everyone is connected thanks to small-town upbringings; though their trajectories are different, the secrets of their home are a binding force that brings the tale together. Suspense builds toward the book's end, foreshadowing evil events in nearby Wichita, while descriptions of the Kansas landscape are provided to develop the setting further.

In the fantasy novel *Black Oak*, citizens across two eras reckon with strange creatures among them.

PHILIP ZOZZARO (October 1, 2020)

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