ForeWord Reviews

MYSTERY

Daemon of the Dark Wood
Randy Chandler
Comet Press
978-1-936964-46-8
(February 2012)

In the small north Georgia town of Dogwood, a deputy sheriff answering a missing person report on a local resident finds the woman's car, but not her. Certain clues make him suspect something's amiss—especially when he learns that the woman had already called the car repair shop, and her purse and cellphone are still in the car.

As Deputy Sheriff Rob Rourke continues his investigation, a community college professor pursues both a century-old mountain legend and the elderly woman who guards the frightening secret of Widow's Ridge. More women soon go missing, bodies begin turning up with hideous wounds, and Rourke is confronted by a nightmare come true. This is no ghost or revenant, however; the force that seeks to enter the human realm is far more ancient and destructive than any spirit.

Writing fiction is like performing a magic trick: whatever the writer sets up has to be followed through perfectly, so that the prestige (the surprise at the end, the "magic") earns the reader's praise. In horror fiction, there's an additional trick that is even more difficult for the inexperienced: offering just enough, but not too much, information. In Randy Chandler's third novel, some scenes are almost over the top—*almost*. Readers may find an initial impulse of disbelief turning into an "Oh!" moment as small revelations planted throughout the text anchor and support story elements which evoke classical myths and ancient beliefs. The characters are faced with such powerful proof of something unknowable struggling to be set free that their skepticism is overwhelmed. In the face of that much power, readers may likely agree, no other conclusion can be reached.

Chandler has written shorter works (he's frequently included in Comet Press horror anthologies), so he has the necessary pacing skills, character evocation, and setting know-how to write a tightly crafted novel. The mountainous region of Georgia echoes Sharyn McCrumb's Appalachian setting for her mystery books. Mountains are often symbolic of things strange and hidden, and the legend of Widow's Ridge should be entirely believable to anyone familiar with American folklore and folk music, as those stories and songs are replete with betrayal, death,

murder, grief—most all of the negative aspects of human life, in fact.

Daemon of the Dark Wood will please any reader who relishes a well-written tale of ancient knowledge and hidden dangers, and those who fight to keep the human realm free of unbridled evil.

J.G. Stinson