

Feral Darling: The Slayer Anthology

Ed Diamante

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Belief and doubt collide in Feral Darling, a gory horror novel about zealotry and manhood.

A young man is caught up in a timeless battle between good and evil in Ed Diamante's supernatural horror novel *Feral Darling*.

Eighteen-year-old Caelin is struggling. His outdoorsman father pushes him to his limit, and his neighbors in the remote village where he lives think that he's stupid because of his stutter. After a failed climb, he and his father are attacked by a pack of grizzly bears. Caelin's father is mauled to death. When local authorities hear this, they are bewildered, because grizzlies are solitary hunters.

A young woman, Daemiana, is found near Caelin's father's body and brought to the clinic. At first thought to be dead, her resurrection, and subsequent disappearance, puts the staff on edge. After encountering a stranger with a silver sword strapped to his back, Caelin finds Daemiana hiding under a gurney. The stranger, along with two others, is searching for the girl. Caelin, overwhelmed by his attraction to Daemiana, vows to save her. At nightfall, large creatures stalk the village, like no bears Caelin has ever seen; the three strangers, armed to the teeth, give chase into the Alaskan wilderness.

The strangers, the young woman, and the creatures are introduced early on, though their connections aren't clarified until later. Still, the plot turns on the strangers—Catholic warriors trained to hunt and dispatch immortal creatures—and Daemiana, a creature who was captured by, and escaped, the hunters. Daemiana, and those like her, are the result of an unholy pact with the devil. Such an agreement puts any who enter into it at odds with the Catholic Church and with nature itself.

With such compelling backstories for the hunters and Daemiana, though, Caelin's involvement comes to seem superfluous. Still, Caelin is set up as the focal character; he also changes the most because of the supernatural events around him. He is given multiple opportunities to use the knowledge and skills gained from his father's survivalist training, which bolsters him. Despite them, he is, by nature, a nervous and confused individual who's been bullied and dismissed for much of his life; he seems unaware of his own coming of age.

To support its suggestions that Caelin's burgeoning manhood necessitates violence, the book includes acts of bloody battle, but also sexual violence (there are two full scenes of unwanted sexual contact involving Caelin). The language and themes also suggest derogatory views of women, and profanities are prominent and often directed at Daemiana.

Daemiana, despite her background, exercises little agency beyond trying to warn off Caelin from danger. She is presented as alluring and childlike and, as a result of her unholy deal with the devil, evil. In making her all of these things, as well as in making Caelin's growth hinge on him committing extreme acts of violence, the book tips into melodrama. It runs long, and is further bogged down by its distracting dialect and purple prose.

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DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (October 17, 2021)

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