FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Foreword Review THRILLER

Games for Dead Girls

Jen Williams
Crooked Lane Books (Apr 18, 2023)
Hardcover $26.99 (320pp)
978-1-64385-916-3

In Jen Williams's atmospheric thriller *Games for Dead Girls*, supernatural powers are hidden within the limestone caves of southeast England—and within the psyches of adolescent girls.

Charlie was at the center of a horrific crime as a child. As an adult, she lives under a new identity. When a teenage girl, Cheryl, goes missing decades later in the same seaside town, Charlie returns to the scene of the long-ago violence. Feeling compelled to put her shocking memories to rest by helping to find Cheryl but anxious to avoid recognition, Charlie poses as a folklore researcher and begins collecting information about Cheryl and other missing girls.

The novel's grim setting is a caravan park on the coast where a warren of caves served as hiding spots for pirates and smugglers for centuries. As one person notes, the caves are a liminal space, neither part of the sea or the land; anything can happen there. The weight of the secrets buried in the caves contributes to the sense of the caravan park as a vortex where people go missing.

Alternating between time periods, the book pivots around the caravan park like the spokes of a Ferris wheel. In chapters designated "1988," for example, Charlie is on holiday with her large extended family during the park's heyday. She's a typical kid then—except for her obsession with gruesome stories. Raising the stakes again and again in one of her imaginary games builds suspense across the multiple timelines, until the stakes get higher than anyone, including Charlie, might have imagined. The story moves at a swift pace across its fractured landscape, with surprising twists revealing one unexpected connection after another.

As its smaller mysteries are resolved, the complex, multileveled thriller *Games for Dead Girls* pulls the panels of its alternating time frames together in a surprising and satisfying resolution.

MICHELE SHARPE (March / April 2023)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.