



Hourglass

Daniel James

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In the entertaining fantasy novel Hourglass, a half-ghostly team is recruited to stop the malevolent designs of a formidable foe.

Daniel James's fantasy novel *Hourglass* is a carnival funhouse of ghosts, demons, secret agents, and comical would-be heroes.

A vicious former KGB officer and sorcerer, Kozlov, is airlifted to an undisclosed location in upstate New York. There, the team of commandos escorting him are given a grisly demonstration of his mastery of the dark arts.

Elsewhere, Brooklyn cartoonist Clyde habituates comic book shops and dodges muggers. Clyde also hangs out with his best friend, Kev, a ghost who has returned from the dead to continue his former friendship with Clyde. The two are recruited by Rose, an agent for a secret undercover organization, *Hourglass*. They are to assist in the battle against malevolent supernatural forces, including vicious Kozlov.

The heroic duo's adventures take them deep into the bowels of secret organizations, and even into other dimensions; when a supernatural investigator takes Clyde on a spiritual trek that features a hallucinatory morphing of people and places, the sequence is psychedelic and unnerving.

Hourglass contains elements of both comedy and horror. The humor and terror blend well, with Kev's quips and Clyde's awkwardness playing out ably against scenes of violence. Kozlov is a terrifying villain, and the book's espionage material adds further interest. It's reliant on the fascinating premise that ghosts and other supernatural beings walk among humans, leading to the formation of a secret government agency who tracks and even enlists these beings.

Among the cast, Rose stands out because of her sardonic and droll approach. This outlook is reflected among other members of *Hourglass*, too; they assume matter-of-fact attitudes toward the supernatural, which play out against Clyde's incredulity in a winking manner. The result is an imaginative story, in which Kev's adaptations to being a spirit in the material world—including his need to disguise his true form in crazy outfits, and his relief at not having to be bound by physical needs—are clever.

Still, the text itself takes some awkward turns, including into unnecessary verbosity. Ornate lines that are overloaded with adjectives end up impeding the progress of the inventive tale. Further, Kev's undead comedic behaviors wear thin as the book progresses, once his ghost-slacker preoccupations and attitudes have already been sufficiently established. Clyde's digressions to explain how comic books are being appropriated by mainstream culture also slow the otherwise involving story.

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MATT BENZING (February 8, 2022)

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