

Preordained

David L. Wallace

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Supernatural elements transform this mystery into a riveting and intriguing read.

Preordained is an expertly plotted and executed mystery, shot through with supernatural elements. Blurring the line between genres, David Wallace has crafted an intriguing and disturbing tale.

The novel opens as the self-proclaimed “Star of David Killer” stalks his first victims and teeters on the edge between being human and a monster. Loaded with suspense, the scene is a brief portrait of a diseased and dangerous mind, and closes eerily on the killer cleaning his blade.

From there, the novel moves to the perspective of thirty-five-year-old Art Somers, a detective in quiet Murrells Inlet—one of the towns within Georgetown County, South Carolina, the killer’s operating grounds. Someone has been systematically murdering twelve-year-old boys in the county, and Art wonders when the FBI will finally catch the “serial nutcase.”

Preordained is a thrilling mystery novel with tinges of the supernatural. Wallace’s pacing is expert, and his writing is crisp and clear. His style is bare but efficient, building tension as he moves from scene to scene in a quick succession, from a vision that causes Art to doubt his own sanity to the discovery of a mangled, crab-eaten body.

The novel unfolds in layers, with early perceptions slowly changing under Wallace’s expert hand. Throughout, Art remains a relatable and solid narrator. He is likable as a devoted father and grandson, and is both accomplished and formidable, even in the face of increasingly disturbing supernatural visions.

Early sections are cleanly focused; later portions of the book weave in disparate plotlines. Such changes could muddle the book, but Wallace manages to keep a handle on all of the elements that are eventually pulled back to the center of the story. The supernatural factors are jarring at first, but as the fantastical references grow more and more numerous, it becomes clear that this story functions well because of its magic and mystery. Far from just a whodunit, *Preordained* moves into territory that includes possession, visions, and magic.

Some references to race seem inappropriate, as when a detective threatens a suspect with the biggest, ugliest, meanest black cellmate he can find, or with the use of “mulatto,” though the word is used in historical context. The association of supernatural curses with black characters can be discomfiting, even after later revelations about Art himself.

Readers looking for a traditional mystery may be surprised by the book’s turn toward the supernatural, but those who enjoy the mixing of genres and the marriage of horror with the fantastic will find plenty to enjoy. This is a well-written tale that builds suspense effortlessly, hurtling towards a riveting conclusion.

STEPHANIE BUCKLIN (February 8, 2016)

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