



Strangers

David A. Robertson

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Robertson blends Indigenous mythology with First Nation realities in a novel that's utterly unique and wholly convincing.

The first title in the Reckoner series, David A. Robertson's young adult supernatural thriller *Strangers* is a promising entrée into the gritty community of Wounded Sky First Nation. Located in the darkness of Canada's forests, this modern Indigenous community has suffered tragic losses, but it's still standing despite threats within and without. But as one of its own—seventeen-year-old Cole Harper—prepares to return for the first time in ten years, the question quickly becomes whether it will stand for much longer.

A decade ago, horrific tragedies at the local elementary school and corporate lab eliminated almost an entire grade of children. At the same time, a major employer was lost. Between the two events, Cole lost both of his parents and left the community to live in Winnipeg. Now, one of his Wounded Sky friends, Ashley, has asked him to return for a ten-year memorial service, but Cole's decision is complicated by his own trauma.

Cole relents only to discover Ashley didn't invite him back after all. As they're discussing the issue, Ashley is killed, and Cole's nightmare begins anew. The people he loves are threatened once again. Just when things seem like they can't get any worse, an old figure from the school fire returns to remind Cole of an impossible deal he made that fateful day—a deal whose terms are finally coming due.

Unlike many superhero stories, the body count in *Strangers* is personal and painful. Although Cole himself never has a clear understanding of the uncanny powers at play, his very limitations sharpen the stakes. Relationships—whether to the community, his friends, or himself—are valued and valuable, and the novel is rich with fully developed characters. No one is relegated to a prop in this story.

Haunting, high-stakes, and filled with teenage characters so real they feel like they could jump off of the page, *Strangers* is fast-paced and thrilling. The mystery of the initial tragedies and the new trouble that emerges upon Cole's return are captivating until the last page, with gasp-worthy action and real losses sustained throughout. Robertson blends Indigenous mythology with First Nation realities in a novel that's utterly unique and wholly convincing.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (Children's SIP 2017)

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