

The Book of Souls

Kevin Moore

Books Fluent

978-1-953865-41-0

The Book of Souls is an eerie thriller in which a teenager with paranormal gifts attempts to find his lost family.

A near-death experience leaves a teenager between worlds in Kevin Moore's unsettling thriller *The Book of Souls*.

Jack's life with his wife and three children is somewhat chaotic, though they love each other even through troubled times. When his son becomes ill, though, hovering on the edge of death, Jack is witness to him being haunted by shadows that seem to snatch at him from the darkness. Then his son informs him that the shadows are there to claim Jack.

Jack blacks out; when he awakens, he's a teenager again, and is surrounded by nuns and his father. What Jack remembered as his brother's fatal accident was in fact his own near-death experience. Memories of the event come screaming back to him, and skeletal creatures crawl through holes in his reality. He sees a trio of tormented souls trapped in a tortuous loop, as well as a powerful witch who commands his body. With memories of a long life and a family whose members do not exist, Jack struggles.

The story moves back and forth through time, between Jack's alleged false memories of his adult life and his current childhood with his father. As Jack explores the ramifications of his situation, he begins to see he can affect others for the better. An apartment across from his school overflows with supernatural elements, including the ghost of a famous painter and the cackling of demonic beings. The dichotomies between good and evil and past and future results in a compelling story around Jack and his gift.

An eerie tone permeates the entire story, with even mundane events feeling off-kilter. The whole cast seems to have multiple personas, all tinged with darkness. However, there's a stilted tone to the prose that is at odds with Jack's character and the events of the book. Its word choices are too formal, both during casual and horrific sequences. This is most jarring where the book covers Jack's near-death experiences, and where archaic language and awkward conversations dominate.

Most compelling is Jack's Book of Souls—a notebook in which he maintains his wife and children's names, imagining that their souls need to be helped to find the right path. With each paranormal encounter, Jack adds another name to the book, which becomes his source of strength and power. But the mystery around his family's fate fades as Jack amasses names, even though he avows to never give up on trying to find his way back to them.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (December 31, 2021)

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