

The Dead of Winter

A. B. Gibson

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This atmospheric horror novel offers pleasant chills to readers looking for a good, realistic scare.

A. B. Gibson's *The Dead of Winter* utilizes vivid settings and intriguing plot developments in the service of an often scary tale.

Four friends come together for a weekend of fun at an idyllic pumpkin patch and orchard. Josh, Julia, Tara, and Dillon, who have known each other since college, arrange to meet their friend Shelly for a weekend at Winter's Farm. The scenic location and quaint inn seem like the perfect place to relax and catch up, but the family that runs the farm has something far more sinister in mind.

From the beginning, things seem a little off. Josh loses his cell signal on the way and nearly runs down a child wearing a burlap sack on his head. Shelly does not show up and no one can reach her. Carrie, another guest at the farm, seems a little bit crazy, and insists that the Winter family is trying to kill her. As the weekend progresses, strange occurrences lead the group to believe they are all in danger, but leaving proves far more difficult than anticipated.

The Dead of Winter is an enjoyable story, its setting both appealing and realistic. Grainy photographs and drawings scattered throughout the text support eerie scenes. The apparent innocence and charm of the farm is a wonderful backdrop for moments of genuine, spine-tingling fear, as when the group heads out on the haunted hayride through the corn maze: "The Clown hangs onto the back of the wagon rail with one arm...two freakish heads dangle from his free hand. He swings them forward and backward, bashing them against the railing of the wagon, spraying blood and teeth."

A present-tense narrative makes for limited character development, and the text lacks the backstories necessary for best understanding its characters. As a consequence, their behavior is often difficult to accept. This is particularly true when a passed-out woman is attacked and none of her friends really believe her. Instead, they cling to the belief that the Winter family could not possibly mean them harm.

The conclusion to the book is unsatisfying and abrupt. Not all storylines are resolved, and the fates of certain characters are not explored.

But these frustrating moments do not keep the overall experience of Gibson's book from being an enjoyable one. Fans of atmospheric horror will appreciate *The Dead of Winter*. This novel is sure to be a pleasantly chilling way to pass a cold autumn night.

CATHERINE THURESON (February 1, 2016)

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