

★ **The Devil's Claw****Lara Dearman**

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This murder mystery exudes slow dread—a perfect novel for a cold night in dark winter.

Lara Dearman's *The Devil's Claw* is a terrifying story centered on an islander who finds herself in the middle of a gruesome murder spree.

An excellent balance of the macabre and the mirthful, the novel takes place on the British island of Guernsey. This foggy Channel island has a unique history, including its occupation by the Nazis, which lasted from 1940 until 1945.

That dark history returns when Jennifer Dorey, a former Londoner who has come home, stumbles upon a string of mutilated bodies that bear the hallmarks of malefic rituals. Dorey is joined in her investigation by Detective Chief Inspector Michael Gilbert and a cast of Guernsey oddballs, including a gang of goths and at least one ex-soldier who is part of a right-wing movement to protect Guernsey's national identity.

The writing is smooth, and the story is expertly told in terms of pacing and atmosphere. From the first, *The Devil's Claw* presents disquieting scenery, an environment where conspiracies are real and local villages hide unbelievable secrets.

Dorey is an excellent lead. The down-to-earth reporter who still lives with her mum is a believable everywoman. Likewise, Gilbert is not a fey eccentric or a bitter veteran—he is merely a thorough detective, with one foot out the door as he heads toward retirement.

The plot is pure potboiler, with time used to its advantage. It is not always a linear narrative, and digressions into the past—both recent and dusty—allow the story's true horror to unfold slowly.

The Devil's Claw is nightmarish; it's a perfect novel for a cold night in dark winter. This murder mystery exudes slow dread and often feels more like a horror tale than a detective story. It is not just the butchered corpses that are fear-inducing, it is also the madness that lurks in the hearts of ordinary-looking people, and the implication that nowhere is safe from sin.

BENJAMIN WELTON (January/February 2018)

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