



The Girl From Dark Dakota

Bryan Devore

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The past haunts a troubled Midwestern town in the moody horror novel The Girl from Dark Dakota.

In Bryan Devore's paranormal novel *The Girl from Dark Dakota*, supernatural evils haunt a town in which death has concealed dark secrets.

On Halloween, a girl is murdered in a small town in North Dakota. Her grisly death fits in with a string of murders in the town, and the event pulls an independent investigative team together. It consists of a local high school student, Rachel, who's a member of the Ghost Hunting Club; Jason, an auditor who sees a ghost in the town while he's visiting from Chicago; Donovan, a professor who debunks supernatural claims, though he yearns to reconnect with his dead son; and Madame Helen, a psychic whose parlor tricks belie her immense powers, including of clairvoyance.

The book's mysterious occurrences and dark forces contrast with, and are grounded by, its ordinary setting. Williston is established as a place that was hit hard by economic hardships, especially following the decline of its oil industry, and details of transient workers and struggling hospitals establish its reality. Meanwhile, otherworldly threats haunt it, representing another side of its citizens' fears.

The team's investigation is covered with palpable details. They undertake late night traipses through eerie cemeteries and Ouija board seances; even traffic stops are made tense. Images of ponds that reflect the moon, dark clouds in the night sky, and wet asphalt in an empty parking lot make the atmosphere more foreboding. However, conversations between the cast are too expository: they ask each other questions, and explain what's going on, in an awkward way. This habit becomes more intrusive as the novel becomes more supernatural, expanding to explain seances, ghosts, and other occult elements.

But the characters are complex, and each grows in the course of their investigation. Donovan's hardened skepticism gives way to open-mindedness because of their encounters, and Helen goes from making wild guesses about troubled clients' backgrounds to traveling across realms, though she remains conflicted about her supernatural abilities. Their states of mind are made apparent throughout: they are set on edge by encounters with strangers in hotel lobbies; they travel desolate highways with a sense of purpose. Each of their actions is immediate and complicated, and they all hold attention. Still, the action of the book's final scenes is comparatively disembodied, and the resolution itself is not entirely surprising.

Its buildup extensive and tense, the horror novel *The Girl from Dark Dakota* features restless spirits who torment a small town.

JOSEPH S. PETE (September 8, 2021)

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