

Verland: The Transformation

B.E. Scully

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Following the death of her beloved mother, true-crime author Elle Bramasol struggles to make meaning of her life. Instead, she gets pulled into a deep and deadly web when domineering Hollywood producer Eliot Kingman calls upon her from prison to pen a manuscript about his murder conviction. She soon discovers that the story Kingman wants her to write intertwines with the diary of an ancient vampire named Verland. Upon reading Verland's diary, she goes from skeptic to believer. She'll be lucky if she manages to uncover the truth and stay alive at the same time. First-time author BE Scully deftly mixes philosophy, suspense, and humor to create a juicy new twist on the vampire legend with *Verland: The Transformation*.

Scully skillfully pulls off a story-within-a-story, drawing readers into the protagonist's narrative, but also into the vampire's diary. Although Verland does not appear outside the diary until the end of the book, the anticipation of Verland's appearance in the story and the desire to learn the connections between Elle, Kingman, and Verland propel readers onward. Every character, even the minor ones, possess complex backstories and motivations, which means that nothing is as it first appears. In a masterstroke, Scully gives his characters aptly symbolic names, but he doesn't clobber readers with symbolism.

Verland's diary entries let the reader into the evolving soul of a brooding bloodsucker. The author departs from the current trend of sexy vampires, instead using old lore to create a unique brand of monster all his own. Best of all, immortality is not a sought-after prize, but a source of never-ending consternation and ennui. More interesting still, the vampires in the novel (of which Verland is only one) are not trapped in indestructible bodies but in rotting corpses that must be replenished with human blood to keep from decomposing. Scully asks readers to ponder if vampires are indeed villains, and why humans are both fascinated by and fearful of death.

Verland: The Transformation is a meditation upon mortality: a thinking reader's vampire novel. Even so, there exists enough creepiness to satisfy people who just love a good scare. As Kingman's Machiavellian nature is revealed by degrees, the reader grows more and more afraid, especially because manipulators like Kingman exist in the real world. Although the actions of Verland and Kingman may be despicable, the author constructs his characters so adeptly that readers see their nuances.

Additionally, the author excels at describing settings, and the vivid details about the otherworldly locations add to the overall spookiness of the book. Indeed, the settings themselves become characters, as Scully breathes life into places as diverse as bloody battlefields of Prussia, Mayan villages in the 1930s, and present-day Los Angeles. Each place exudes its own mystical eeriness, which adds to the satisfyingly chilling nature of the novel.

As a warning to the reader this book contains graphic descriptions of rotting corpses. Reading *Verland: The Transformation* will forever transform your view of vampires.

JILL ALLEN (August 2, 2011)

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