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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Within the Wind

David W. Stewart
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Hurricanes, ancient spirits, psychic powers, ghostly possession, paramedics, and gang members swirl together in Floridian David W. Stewart's sequel to his novel *Psychic Redemption. Within the Wind* finds paramedic Bonnie rid of her mother Julia's ghost, whom she battled in the previous novel. As *Within the Wind* opens, Bonnie and the other residents of Coreopsis, Florida, accept Bonnie's psychic powers—a gift left behind after her mother's spirit possessed her. Consequently, when a pregnant Bonnie receives a vision of a deadly storm set to engulf her town, emergency preparations begin in earnest. Bonnie also learns that a spirit within the hurricane wants to possess the soul of her daughter. Meanwhile, Ladamien, a human trafficker with a conscience, is conflicted about his sordid career. While Ladamien is out of town on business, his ill wife and psychic young son remain stranded in Coreopsis. In the midst of the hurricane, Bonnie crosses paths with Ladamien's family and beings from the spirit world as she fights to keep herself, her baby, and Ladamien's sick wife safe.

Stewart excels in description. His vivid depictions of Floridian flora and fauna and the destruction of the storm transport white-knuckled readers to Coreopsis as Bonnie and her friends struggle to weather the disaster. He also describes Bonnie's paramedic work in suspenseful detail. Additionally, Stewart breathes new life into the would-be cliché of Ladamien, the criminal with a moral center. Readers will believe his wavering resolve as he tries to decide whether his illegal activities are worth the danger.

Less successful, however, are the paranormal dimensions of the story. The prologue sums up *Psychic Redemption* in two pages, bombarding readers with information, instead of revealing things little by little as *Within the Wind* unfolds. Indeed, whenever these past events are mentioned, the information from the prologue is dumped on characters in a series of matter-of-fact paragraphs repeating the prologue. The town's acceptance of Bonnie's visions is bizarre; one wishes the author went into more detail about how Bonnie gained such credibility. When characters hear that Bonnie's baby has been possessed by a spirit, no one seems appropriately shocked; after a few preliminary questions, everyone takes the whole thing in stride without the expected terror. Bonnie is psychically visited by one of the chiefs of Florida's Lost Tribes. Unfortunately, the identity of these Lost Tribes ultimately remains unclear. Lastly, Bonnie's exorcism is performed by a stereotypical, plump, earth-mother who speaks in cringe-worthy, Southern dialect. Punctuation errors pile up toward the end, enough to annoy readers. For sufficient context, reading *Psychic Redemption* prior to *Within the Wind* is recommended.
JILL ALLEN (February 1, 2011)

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