



Grim

Sara B. Elfgren

Judith Kiros, Translator

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Sara B. Elfgren's novel *Grim* sets paranormal suspense and occult magical realism to the soundtrack of eighties death metal.

Kasper is eighteen and lives in the shadow of his father's once-popular death metal band, Dark Cruelty. Named after the band's vocalist (who was nicknamed "Grim") he is haunted by ominous dreams that push him to investigate Grim's mysterious death before Dark Cruelty's disbandment thirty years prior.

While Kasper works at a haunted house attraction for the summer, his connection to Grim grows deeper, causing him to abandon all sense of safety. Meanwhile, Grim's remaining bandmates prove hesitant to reveal what they know. As Grim's past comes together with Kasper's present, paranormal and occult forces also combine to unveil the dark truth.

In the alternating timelines, Grim's descent into darkness in the eighties runs parallel to Kasper's increasing paranoia in the present day. The visions that Kasper experiences create a perfect amount of suspense. And beyond its paranormal elements, the novel touches on themes of depression and friendship, humanizing its story.

The prose is vibrant and evocative where it most needs to be, with the momentary exception of Kasper's experience working as a demon at the haunted house attraction, which is described in sparing terms. Still, *Grim* creates excellent tension, delivering clues at key moments without revealing too much at once. As Kasper acknowledges his connection to Grim, his ominous visions evoke a sense of mystery that builds up until the book's climax.

With themes echoing the battle between darkness and light, *Grim* is a captivating dark fantasy novel that explores what happens when reality clashes with the supernatural.

ALLISON JANICKI (May / June 2023)

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