

Our Winter Monster

Dennis Mahoney

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A couple experiences the futility and horror of trying to outrun their problems in Dennis Mahoney's horror novel *Our Winter Monster*.

Holly and Brian rumble toward a ski resort to salvage their scattered partnership. A blizzard is on their tail. Their car loses control on the snowy highway, separating them short of their destination.

The encroaching storm accentuates a score of hazy carnage throughout Pinebuck, New York. Another couple walking in the woods is confronted by the swirling terror of what appears to be an ice monster; a local who believes the phenomenon is a bear finds out the hard way that the truth isn't quite as simple. The recent disappearance of a couple vacationing in Pinebuck looms. The town's sheriff, Kendra, tries to piece together the gory facts of a new batch of tragedies.

The novel is slathered in introspection, its surface story haunted by a mysterious event in Holly and Brian's recent past. A series of flashbacks highlight a catalyst in the trajectory of their relationship, dubbed "the Bad Date." The coalescence of the blurred snow-demon appears illusory: its presence is noted during moments of crisis and high emotion, as though it is somehow metaphorical, leading to additional eeriness. Holly, Brian, and Kendra are each haunted by traumatic memories that follow them like shadows and propel the claustrophobic action. Horrific scenes of blood-strewn havoc are eased by plaintive scenes of clarity wherein the balance between being in control, forgetting yourself, and the unstoppable burden of change is cast in flurrying light.

With a broken relationship as its psychological bedrock, the horror novel *Our Winter Monster* is like a nightmare couple's therapy session you can't help but spy on.

RYAN PRADO (January / February 2025)

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