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Jarret Middleton

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Returning home to the Ozarks for the wedding of his twin brother, Jordan uncovers a dark vein in the Bayne family history: going back to the end of the Civil War, every generation of Bayne men have been twins--and one twin has always murdered their father.

As old tensions resurface, Jordan searches out the surreal origins of his family and a way to escape the murder that is his inheritance. Following the brothers' every move are a mysterious hill dweller and his grotesque partner, a duo that will stop at nothing to make sure the Baynes' cursed legacy lives on.

Darkansas Details

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Author : Jarret Middleton

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From Reader Review Darkansas for online ebook

Charity says

I am not really sure what I think about this book. I enjoyed reading it, but I am still a little unclear about some of the plot twists. At times, the story felt disjointed. What I find really interesting about this story is that I am still thinking about it after I have moved on a new book. Apparently, I am not alone in my wavering. The reviews for this book are all over the map. In the end, I gave it four stars because I am considering reading it again sometime to find out if I missed something important in the first reading.

Laura Keating says

Not a ghost story, but nevertheless a tale of haunted characters and inexorable fate. Middleton's command of the language and sense for story is evident from paragraph one, and his sure hand guides readers through both the subtly surreal world he's created and the apparently cursed history of the Bayne family. A story thoroughly about the complex nature of male bonding and relationships, as well as violence, my one critique falls upon the female characters, and their characterization and treatment therein. With the lens so focused on the leading male characters, the women were pale and narrow compared to the rich attention given the men of the story. However, I look forward to future works by Middleton, and would recommend this book to fans of the southern gothic tradition, David Lynch, and dark family dramas.

Dan Cline says

Two things about this novel.

1. It was well written until it hit the part about getting a washing machine at Target. I had to double check online and was pretty certain that you can't get appliances at Target. Whoops!

That only brought it down a little bit though (honest mistake).

However the next one really brought the book down.

2. I was really enjoying this book around a 4 star status, because of the way the author wrote and because of the story-line. However, it went South in a hurry! I don't like it when you invest hours reading nearly a couple hundred pages into a book and nearing the end only to have the author completely destroy the story by getting impatient. The final 10 pages of the book were horrible. SPOILER ALERT!!! The Antagonist (a guy...or at least I was led to believe it was a guy) gave birth to twins. That made absolutely no sense to me as a reader and I felt the whole explanation of who he was and how this whole curse came about needed ALOT more explanation. With more explanation and patience on this book....a 4 star possibility.

Trae Alston says

A short, straight-to-the-point novel, I was utterly underwhelmed. I really wanted to like it, but it fell flat. The description of the novel gave the entire story away, and what was supposed to be surprising, was not. Now, this has nothing to do with the writing, where, on a sentence to sentence level, is very good. But good sentences does not equal a good novel.

Darkansas could have, and probably should have, been 600 pages. This would have given the characters more time to be fully-formed, rather than feeling like stock characters from a mediocre TV movie.

I'd certainly read more from Middleton, though.

Michael Ferro says

DARKANSAS is a brilliant debut from an incredible new voice in the treasured Southern Gothic tradition. Like the desolate landscapes of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, Middleton creates a world that is as dark and unique as any, populating it with gritty characters afflicted with a predestined sense of doom. All of this is splendidly shaped for the reader through a sharp and vivid prose, with Middleton leaving no stone unturned.

Setting his sights high with grand themes of love, destiny, and family, Jarret Middleton hits all of his marks in DARKANSAS. A haunting novel that will leave you contemplating it all for weeks after, this is a book that cannot be underestimated.

Galen Weitkamp says

Darkansas by Jarret Middleton.
Review by Galen Weitkamp.

Jordan Bayne is a knockabout country musician from the Ozarks eking out a living playing backwater bars in San Antonio. Jordan always felt that he had been eclipsed by both his father, Walker Bayne, a bluegrass picker of some repute and his twin brother, Malcolm, who is a successful insurance agent. Jordan is troubled: by women, by drink, by ill-temper and dreams - beguiling, foreboding, inexplicable and surreal.

The twins rejoin with their father back at the old homestead in rural Arkansas to celebrate Malcolm's wedding and to meet his bride, Elizabeth. This is when things turn dark. Jordan begins to stir the ashes of the family's past. Why doesn't Uncle Jacob come around anymore? Why isn't he coming to the wedding? Are Walker and Jacob really twin brothers too? And why is a dwarf and a thin, seven-foot tall giant spying on the family? Ancient animosities, fates and a recurring curse seem to be entangled with the Bayne family history.

Jarett Middleton, weaves a strange and captivating spell of Ozark noir and dark mystery. He never goes overboard, but leads the reader on into the woods with breadcrumbs and fantasy.

Susan says

This was incredibly awful. Poorly written, poorly edited and with a story that was laughable and boring. I

read to 34% before giving up and skimming the rest to see if it would get any better. It did not.

Dianah says

Somewhere between the edges of grit-lit, horror, fantasy, mystery, Southern gothic, domestic drama, and magical realism, lies Jarret Middleton's *Darkansas*.

A seemingly straightforward tale of a family curse takes several wide turns and ends up being something so far afield, it's kind of astonishing. Jordan and Malcolm are the last in a long line of Bayne twins to fall under the grip of the curse that has wreaked havoc on their ancestors; in each generation, one of the Bayne twins will kill their father.

Middleton's inventive story traces the Bayne family line from modern day, all the way back to the civil war. Using deliciously unreliable narrators, deeply conflicted characters, and an entrenched emotionality, Middleton writes a book that will leave you feeling absolute wonder at his creativity, and a longing for more.

Friscomama says

Darkansas is my favorite read of the year so far. I can certainly understand the readers who were disappointed by this book as a gothic horror book, because it doesn't exactly fit on that shelf. I would categorize it as magical realism. The suspense is about the relationships of family members in a family with many secrets, with the sons who both loved and hated each other, each questioning their own place in the world and their relationship with their father. Closely held secrets haunt a family for generations. I am at a loss to say much more. I love this book.

Guy Choate says

I especially enjoyed the multi-generational aspect of this book, the way Middleton took us from one time period to the next. And I enjoyed the grit of the characters. But I had a hard time getting into the fantastical elements surrounding the curse. Just the same, I'm looking forward to Middleton's next book.

Danny Cerullo says

Maybe I've hit my quota on hard drinking southern white guys with a propensity for violence novels but this book really offered nothing new. It's decently well-written but I think in order to tell a story that's been told so many times already the writing has to be damn near perfect.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 2.5* of five

The Publisher Says: Jordan is a country musician living in the shadow of his father, legendary bluegrass musician Walker Bayne. A lifetime of poor decisions has led him on an endless tour of San Antonio dive bars, where between sets he resumes accruing women and drinking himself to the brink of disaster.

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As old tensions resurface, Jordan searches out the surreal origins of his family and a way to escape the murder that is his inheritance. Following the brothers' every move are a mysterious hill dweller and his grotesque partner, a duo that will stop at nothing to make sure the Baynes' cursed legacy lives on.

My Review: From page 195:

Andridge woke beneath the considered gaze of a young girl. Weakness decimated his attempts to move or speak. He was tucked beneath a blanket in a comfortable bed in a clean, well-kept house. Daylight glowed through the blind drawn over the only window. He folded back the covers and basked in the relief of fresh air on his skin. Regaining his senses overwhelmed him at first. Weakness sapped his muscles, stiffness spread to the rigid tips of his toes. A high-pitched ringing pierced the drum of his inner ear, when he flexed his jaw the room went mute. His tongue flopped foreign in his mouth, and he could still barely hear past his own breathing.

Oh dear.

Weakness twice. Once it decimates then it saps. Somehow his sapped decimation still allows him to fold back covers. Someone is sitting in the room looking at him and his inner-ear drum (as opposed to the outer-ear one) is pierced by ringing but he can barely hear over the sound of his own breathing and, when he flexes his jaw, the (inanimate ergo voiceless) room goes mute.

There is so, so much more of this on the other pages, this words slightly misused, this metaphors so mixed they'd break every racial purity law ever drafted, this clangorous overwrought writerly performance anxiety that I want to take the Dzanc people, heretofore in my highest esteem and most grateful graces, out to the woodshed for some serious bastinado-ing.

Gorgeous jacket, elegant text design, good-quality paper, praise from authors whose work I like and respect; and yet this is not a good book, so I can't get it up to fake a nice-person review. Not even because it was an early birthday present from a certain young man who is doing his damndest to dig himself out of a really, really deep hole he dug for himself. It's a shame someone paid an advance for this, paid to edit it, paid to design, copyedit, proofread, print, and bind it, when it should live in the author's top drawer and another, better book now languishing in a similar top drawer should be here gladdening my heart with its aesthetic merits.

Instead, I'm ticking demerit after demerit off what was a very good idea (yes, Young Gentleman Caller, you chose well, this is my kind of story) whose promised parts...father/son musical rivalry, supernatural shenanigans foretold in an excellent dream sequence...just fail to cohere into the augured configuration.

Failure to launch.

Jason Squire Fluck says

Dark and gritty with a supernatural tilt, Jarret Middleton's first novel DARKANSAS wastes no time getting down to business. Bad boy and ne'er do well Jordan Bayne has been summoned home for his twin brother's wedding, a home he hasn't seen in more than ten years. An itinerant musician living in his father's shadow, Jordan loves women and trouble. Where Jordan failed at life's successes, his brother Malcolm has ticked off all the boxes, capping his successful run at life with a perfect bride to be. The fraternal twins love, and hate, each other. Unbeknownst to them both, the prodigal son's return will trigger a generations' long curse dating back to the Civil War with tragic consequences. They're reunion could be the beginning of the end. I don't like spoilers, so I won't reveal any more of the storyline. I enjoyed Middleton's tone and style but the first chapters had promise that did not pan out, the novel was missing depth and arc. Character development and storyline, especially the mystic qualities on which the underlying storyline depends, rarely move beyond surface quality. At times, I found the dialogue and the action more expository than organic. Middleton offered an interesting premise with unfulfilled promise, but not for lack of talent-Middleton is no hack. Hopefully his sophomore run gets deep below the surface so we can see what his characters are truly thinking and feeling and doing.

Ashley says

Received as a giveaway-

This book just didn't make any sense to me. To start with, the description on the jacket gives away the entire story. It left nothing for me to wonder about what was coming up. I could've tolerated the enormous spoiler if the book wasn't also so poorly written.

On a positive note, I did like how the story bounced back and forth between the present and the history of the family, going further back each time. The physical book itself was well put together, very nice cover.

I was really hoping to enjoy Darkansas more than I did.

Lisa Benenati says

Darkansas tells the story of Jordan Bayne, a musician who has spiraled into an endless cycle of dive bar shows, random women, and alcohol. Jordan's brother is getting married, and so he returns home after years away to be there for his brother and to deal with all the relationships he's ruined along the way. Beyond that, I honestly couldn't tell you much about what happens. Even though the characters are described as having different personalities, their actions and speaking patterns were all so similar they sort of blended together, making reading confusing at times. The writing is also very flowery; there are some lines that are absolutely beautiful, but many that are long-winded and should have been edited down for clarity. I did like that the chapters alternated from present to past, showing how the family's curse began and how it was passed down for generations. If more emphasis had been placed on the curse itself and its effects on present-day, this could have been a really interesting novel.

