



A Dark Matter

Peter Straub

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The incomparable master of horror and suspense returns with a powerful, brilliantly terrifying novel that redefines the genre in original and unexpected ways.

The charismatic and cunning Spenser Mallon is a campus guru in the 1960s, attracting the devotion and demanding sexual favors of his young acolytes. After he invites his most fervent followers to attend a secret ritual in a local meadow, the only thing that remains is a gruesomely dismembered body—and the shattered souls of all who were present.

Years later, one man attempts to understand what happened to his wife and to his friends by writing a book about this horrible night, and it's through this process that they begin to examine the unspeakable events that have bound them in ways they cannot fathom, but that have haunted every one of them through their lives. As each of the old friends tries to come to grips with the darkness of the past, they find themselves face-to-face with the evil triggered so many years earlier. Unfolding through the individual stories of the fated group's members, *A Dark Matter* is an electric, chilling, and unpredictable novel that will satisfy Peter Straub's many ardent fans, and win him legions more.

A Dark Matter Details

Date : Published February 9th 2010 by Doubleday (first published 2010)

ISBN : 9780385516389

Author : Peter Straub

Format : Hardcover 397 pages

Genre : Horror, Fiction, Mystery, Thriller, Abandoned

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From Reader Review A Dark Matter for online ebook

Bill says

I'm not sure what happened here. There wasn't anything going on and then there was way too much and I got lost a bit. I am still not quite sure what happened.

If you chopped this up into 3 equal pieces and then threw two of them away it would have been much better. Great theme and well written but perhaps a bit ambitious in concept and overblown.

Barbara says

I was into it until the last 50 pages or so. The story of Eel was obviously intended to be the ultimate explanation of the characters' occult experience together. I found it to be, I hate to be mean spirited but I'm going to be anyway: overwritten claptrap. I slogged through it. After all, I was in the last 50 pages of a 400 page book. But the time I was done, I no longer cared about the characters and was angry at the author. I have read other things from Peter Straub and have always liked him. This one, though, I HATED the ending. I'm giving the book to the library. Brand new hard cover.

Rdriley says

Ugh. What a complete waste of time this was. Whatever mojo Straub had in crafting classics like "Ghost Story" and "The Throat" is utterly absent here.

The story itself is somewhat engaging, but the characters are barely drawn, the dialog is wooden and often cringingly unrealistic, and the structure is just a mess.

Straub seems to be aiming for a sort of "Roshomon" type of tale, but all he really does is repeat the same hackneyed scenes from the viewpoints of different characters. There's no individual interpretation, or even the most minor disagreement among the characters about what happened all those years ago.

Honestly, it pretty much goes like this:

Character A's story:

"I was walking in front of Character B as we passed the empty lot."

Character B's story:

"I was walking behind Character A as we passed the empty lot."

And then Characters C and D come by and tell you where they were during the Great Empty Lot Passing of 1968.

Worst of all, these various permutations and flashbacks add up to a whole lot of nothing. The basic facts of "what happened on that fateful day" are laid out right from the beginning, and by the end, the only information that's been added is some meaningless detail and a bit of clunky, uninspired musing on the nature of evil.

D. Eric says

What a let down. I have loved every Peter Straub book (I have read them all) up until this one. *A Dark Matter* simply goes nowhere. The characters are uninteresting and even a bit annoying at times, and the constant rehashing of events through the eyes of different characters just gets boring in the long run. There also never seems to be a real driving force or need to find out what really happened, and when we do, we are left with "oh, I read all this for that?" Here is the main story line from Publisher's weekly:

...four high school friends in 1966 Madison, Wis.—Hootie Bly, Dilly Olson, Jason Boatman, and Lee Truax—fall under the spell of charismatic wandering guru Spencer Mallon. During an occult ceremony in which Mallon attempts to break through to a higher reality, something goes horribly awry leaving one participant dead. Decades later, Lee's writer husband interviews the quartet to find out what happened.

The problem is we do not really care what happened, nor do we really like any of the characters. If you are a fan of Straub you might want to read it for his still-worthy prose style, but as far as the story itself, you can skip this one.

Matthew Weber says

This is a very ambitious book with rich characterization and a non-linear plot, which hinges on a decades-old mystery that's pieced together through a variety of conflicting viewpoints throughout the course of the story. It's a well written tale with something to say about the human condition, good versus evil, and mankind's small role in this vast universe. And while the subject matter regarding otherworldly gods and parallel universes can get really far-fetched, it's handled in a hallucinatory manner that keeps the story sufficiently anchored in reality that I didn't put it down and roll my eyes. For those looking for white-knuckle terror, this title probably won't do the trick, and that's largely due to the central concept of piecing together an old mystery for the sake of personal curiosity (and insight into the protagonist's marriage). While this may be a serviceable way to plot the narrative, there are no immediate stakes to the characters in the present, and this serves to dilute the tension since the "mysterious incident" appears to pose no threat to the characters' current reality. With that said, the wild world that Straub weaves and the interesting players that populate it are enough for me to recommend this book to horror fans. 3.5 stars

Rob says

Peter Straub has written some of my favorite horror stories. *A Dark Matter* is not one of them. In fact, it's a miserable failure in virtually every way, from a narrator who's barely a part of his own story to a narrative structure so redundant and tedious I felt the words pinging unprocessed off my eyeballs to a central conflict that manages to be both incoherent and boring. A few words about the story, because that's all it's worth: narrator Lee Harwell is a writer who wants to find out what really happened when his group of high school

friends (including his future wife) follow a charismatic guru into a field to conduct a mysterious ceremony that resulted in the death of one of them. What follows is a wannabe-*Rashomon*, where Lee reconnects with his old friends to get their side of the story.

This could have been great. As I get older I'm drawn to stories where people try to make sense of their youth, and, as I mentioned above, Straub is a favorite of mine from way back. But this is just piss-poor storytelling, top to bottom. There were hints of the book that could have been (hence the two stars), but for most of the time I couldn't have been less interested if this had been a 500-page manual of IKEA assembly instructions.

Also, how the *hell* did this win the 2010 Bram Stoker Award?

Shovelmonkey1 says

I've never encountered Peter Straub before and if it was not for the cautionary words of Maciek, who informed me that this was his most non scary output, i would probably not run out to seek his alternative works. My motivation for purchasing this book was quite shallow - there was a quote with the word 'terrifying' followed by the name Stephen King . Ah, i thought, there's a man who knows scary . If it made Mr King crap his pants then that is high praise indeed . All i can say is that maybe Steve was having a day where he needed his blanky and bobo because i waited for the scary and it never came.

Just to double check i rifled all the pages good and proper and gave the book a good hard shake. nothing fell out. Nope, definitely no scary in there.

So it's the 1960s and everyone is dressed like the kids in Stand by me and there are these kids with colourful nicknames .. Hootie, the Eel, Twin, Boats and Dilly and they fall collectively under the thrall of wandering stranger, moocher and self proclaimed guru .

Said moocher promises to open the doors of perception and so everyone follows him (aside from twin who is exercising strength of character). Off they skip to a meadow where untoward things take place and one boy gets shredded like a crispy duck appetizer.

Skip more than 30 years into the future and the events of that fateful day still casts a shadowy pall over the lives of those who venturedw into the meadow . One by one everyone shares their version of what really happened

So what really happened ? F*****d if i know and I've only just finished it.

Mcf1nder_sk says

It's been a while since I've engrossed myself in some of my favorite horror writers, so I grabbed one of my unread Straub novels of of my TBR. It's like running into your old friend from high school at a 30-year reunion. This novel reminded me why he was one of my favorite authors for over 20 years.

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When Stephen King quotes "Terrifying...Impossible to put down...Put this one high on your list.", you know

you are in for one hell of a ride. When a traveling spiritualist/con man involves four high school students in a "momentous" event in an open field in 1966, they have no idea of the horrors that will be released. What happened on that night will change each of their lives forever.

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I really enjoyed this tale, but it was not my favorite Straub. This one, however, will have you wondering "What's on the other side of the veil?".

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Maciek says

I like Peter Straub. He's an ambitious writer who tries to do more with his novels, stretch out, ignore the borders and "go there", to the vast, unexplored land of the possibility of invention. Clive Barker didn't name him "a great classicist" without a reason - he's a pleasure to *read*. His work is intriguing, memorable and intelligent - the weird tale of Tom Flanagan and Del Nightingale that makes *Shadowland*, the terror of Eva Galli and the Chowder society in *Ghost Story* and the Vietnam vets who venture out to find *Koko*, the town of Hampstead and its inhabitants seized by two horrors in *Floating Dragon*...these are people, places and events that have managed to do one of the best things fiction can do: they have staying power, and make us think about them and return to them in the future, again and again.

After seeing several video interviews with Mr. Straub he comes off like a really cool guy, full of ideas and enthusiasm when it comes to writing, someone with whom it would be a pleasure to hang out and talk about all sorts of stuff. So, when I heard about *A Dark Matter* and what it was supposed to be about I was anxious to read it.

The time is the blasted 60's; We have a group of four high school friends that falls under the influence of a charismatic guru, the con man Spencer Mallon, who claims that he will be able to change the world, if only for a moment. Enchanted with the promise of something truly extraordinary, they venture into a meadow and perform a mysterious occult ritual. By now it should be obvious that the experience goes waaay out of control, and something awful happens; one person dies, Mallon flees and the survivors are scarred for life.

Years later we met Lee Harwell, a writer, who was not one of those who ventured to the meadow. His wife, also Lee (dubbed "The Eel") was; but even though she was blinded as a consequence she refused to talk about what happened. Lee wants to deal with the past once and for all, and he ventures to find the rest of the survivors and by using their accounts of the happening write the complete story. Through Rashomon-like storytelling the event is told by different people, and each account offers a different interpretation and insight into the occurrences of that night.

Now, here comes the big problem. *A Dark Matter* is not at all scary or spine tingling. It's not even very suspenseful. A similar premise has been executed years earlier by Donna Tartt in *The Secret History*. *A Dark Matter* is nowhere near as captivating. The concept is intriguing - several people relating the same event, meaning their prejudices and personal interests will surface when the accounts will be compared - but the characters are very bland; the writer, the beautiful girl, the sidekick, the hopeless guru figure, sidekick nr.1, sidekick nr.2...it pains me to say this, but only one persona is memorable - Hootie Bly (*Turn of The Screw* anyone?), whom the experience rendered insane, and who is able to communicate with the outside world only through quotations from Nathaniel Hawthorne. And remember, this is the man who created the duo of Flanagini and Night, Tim Underhill, the charming boy named Tom Passmore...even Mallon is bland, and he's

the one who should have been the most mysterious and interesting character.

The other problem with *A Dark Matter* is that it simply goes nowhere. It has intrigue, but only barely at moments; there are moments of great imagery, but through repetition that offers little variation they soon become mundane and unimpressive. There are elements that offered great promise but somehow have never been expanded upon; the Mallon character is the best example. And when the puzzles come together, all the stories are known, the conclusion arrives which is a straightforward disappointment. I won't reveal the idea behind *A Dark Matter*, but I expected much, much more from a novel with such promise, scope and ambition.

Perhaps the biggest problem with the novel is that there's not enough story to justify its length. It would be a good novella, but the constant shifts do not allow for enough suspense to develop. To put things simply, it goes way to much around the bush, and too rarely peers into the tangled hedges of supposed wretchedness and horror. It's enjoyable at times, but there really wasn't anything *there*.

Peter Straub is a writer who has done, and with no doubt will do much better than this in the future. *A Dark Matter* is far and away from his best; For readers fresh to his work I'd recommend *Shadowland* which this book heavily borrows from, his great classic *Ghost Story* which is essential reading for any fan of horror, and *Floating Dragon* which utilized some similar concepts. *A Dark Matter* is for the completists only. I don't feel I wasted time reading it, but if it was my first work by this great author I'm not sure I would come back for more.

PUMPKINHEAD says

I wanted to LOVE this book. I really did.

When I read the back cover, I was hooked. The premise sounded awesome: a group of college friends in the 1960s who fall under the spell of a new age guru, and together they engage in a strange ritual which brings them into contact with otherworldly beings which shape the course of their lives thereafter...

And that ritual they conduct is undoubtedly the best part. In fact, it is pretty downright awesome. The creatures/beings that each of them encounter (they are all different) are very creepy and fantastically imagined. I loved it and wanted more of it, although the mystery surrounding this 'otherworld' kept me reading all the way to the end.

The rest of the book, however, was pale in comparison. Much of it dragged like a freaking broken zombie leg. There were pockets of almost total boredom scattered throughout. Reading felt like a chore way too often (something I can't stand) and I was hot & cold on too many characters too much of the time.

'A Dark Matter' could have been much, much better. Quite frankly, I expected a lot more from Peter Straub, aka "Master Of Horror". I couldn't shake the feeling while reading 'A Dark Matter' that this is the kind of book that happens when authors careers are set and they get too comfortable. At some points it felt like Straub wasn't even trying anymore.

A shame really, because I thought the potential for this tale was massive. It was very strange to read such awesomeness and such dismal mediocrity in the same story. My feelings on it are equally mixed.

Μιχ?λης says

Πρ?πει να ε?μαι ο μ?νος που ξετρελ?θηκε με αυτ? το βιβλ?ο...

Μ?σα απ? τις οπτικ?ς γων?ες διαφορετικ?ν χαρακτ?ρων βλ?πουμε τις αναμν?σεις τους απ? ?να τελετουργικ? που π?γε στραβ? στην παιδικ? τους η ηλικ?α.

Οι σκην?ς τρ?μου ε?ναι εντυπωσιακ?ς, ?ρχονται ?μως σε στρ?ματα, σαν κρεμ?δι που το ξετυλ?γεις αργ?-αργ? και σχηματ?ζουν ?να εντυπωσιακ? ψηφιδωτ? που με κ?θε ν?ο επ?πεδο σου δ?νει κ?τι παραπ?νω για την ιστορ?α - για το λ?γο αυτ? και καταλαβα?νω γιατ? δεν ?ρεσε σε πολλο?ς, δεν ε?ναι 100% στα μο?τρα σου τρ?μος και σε πολλ? σημει?α επαναλαμβ?νεται, αλλ? με ?ναν τρ?πο που σου αποδ?δει τους διαφορετικο?ς χαρακτ?ρες.

Paul says

Peter Straub's *A Dark Matter* takes the setup that Stephen King turned into a horror trope: a group of friends face unspeakable horror as young 'uns then reconvene when they're old and damaged to finally defeat that unspeakable horror. Only Straub smartly plays it without the rematch. *A Dark Matter* isn't the coming of age take as described above, it's about age itself, and the events and people who shape us.

Lee the narrator is a middle-aged man, best selling novelist married to another Lee (Lee Traux, often referred to as the Eel). Eel and her high school chums fell in with a wandering Timothy Leary type, Spencer Mallon. Only Mallon promised world changing magical experiences, breaking through to a higher reality via the occult. During the ceremony something terrible happens, the aftermath both immediate and decades in length.

Lee (the husband) never trusted Mallon and wasn't at the ceremony, and now years later, he wants to write a book about what happened that night. He travels to and fro interviewing the Eel's friends, and everyone has a differing account of what happened.

The narrative structure of *A Dark Matter* is a joy (a twisting, and morphing first into third person), as are the collection of characters Straub has gathered. While the climatic reveal of Eel's version of that night is somewhat anticlimactic insofar as it's not about the big reveal. The novel isn't supposed to be about the big shock payoff, anyway. It's about the creeping dread of secrets and past lives controlling our present.

Jordan Anderson says

"TERRIFYING," says Stephen King on the front cover of this paperback. "Put this one HIGH ON YOUR LIST."

Well, I can honestly say this book was neither terrifying, nor will it ever receive the distinct honors of getting anywhere near the top of any of my lists...except maybe the top of the "worst books I have ever read" list.

Clearly King was paid a lot of cash to write that blurb, and obviously he and Straub have some kind of weird bromance thing going on since they teamed up for the "Talisman" (which was so opposite of this book, it's hard to believe Straub even had a hand in that one), because "A Dark Matter" is a very long (588 pages), very boring (seriously, it's the same story told over and over again), very bland, novel.

Let's start at the overall plot here. Yeah, it sounds good. It sounds dark. And violent. And mysterious. It is a true attention grabber, no doubt. Somehow, though, Straub doesn't know how to go from just sounding like all those things, because once this novel moves (after something like 120 pages), it just wallows around, repeating the same plot about a confusing portal between good and evil and the things that arise from it. The basic arc is told 4 different times from 4 different point of views, but none of those views ever really does much to advance the story. On the contrary, it only makes it more befuddled, and insanely cryptic. One girl turns into a bird, another gets eaten by some kind of demon that cannot even be described (despite Straub's use of archaic words) one person disappears in some ambiguous vacuum or something but randomly shows up at the very end of the novel, explaining absolutely nothing. Why does a girl go blind? Why does another get lost on a lake? These are the kind of actions and questions that Straub presents but never has any true answers or explanations for.

Sometimes, one can get through a particularly banal plot and confusing writing (look at all those hipster William Faulkner and James Joyce fans), but when a book has that AND a slow pace, then forget about it. "A Dark Matter" suffers even worse in its lack of speed. It is slow. Dreadfully slow. And I say slow with like 6 syllables. Sloooooooooooooooooow. I'm talking being stuck in traffic with a manual transmission, and your foot sitting on the clutch not being able to move for fear of stalling slow. Or waiting in line at the DMV slow. I kept reading, expecting things to pick up. After 100 pages I was sure something exciting and climactic would occur. At 200 pages I was dying of anticipation. At 300 pages I knew I had been duped. At 400 pages I gave up all hope of anything good coming out of this plot and regretted the rest of my day, struggling to finish because I had already divested far too many wasted hours on it.

It makes sense why this book sat on my shelf for 4 long years. I remember purchasing it, only to start and stop numerous times, eventually giving up on it all together. I recently rediscovered it after moving and finding it packed into a dusty box with other long-forgotten novels I never got around to reading. "A Dark Matter" is dull, wasteful, and frustratingly mediocre. Thankfully I am not alone in this assessment. 1 star reviews outnumber 5-star reviews 2 to 1 on Amazon. How this book was awarded a Bram Stoker award is flabbergasting. Maybe the judges were paid off by Straub like King was?

Chris says

Set largely in the 60's in Madison, Wisconsin, this latest novel by Peter Straub is a wonderfully strange ride, part mystery story, and part supernatural horror tale. A group of teenage friends become infatuated and taken in by the charismatic and older college guru, Spencer Mallon, who insists on performing a ritual ceremony off the campus grounds, in order to provide them all with such life changing enlightenment. Instead, one of their group is brutally killed and another vanishes, seemingly, into another realm, and the rest of the group is forever changed. The narrator of this dense, and at times somewhat challenging read, is at the novel's opening chapter thinking back to that time, since he wasn't at the meadow when whatever happened happened, and now that he's a successful novelist, decides to seek out the other members of the group

(including his longtime blind wife, Lee Truax, or called the Eel, since childhood, because the narrator's name is Lee Harwell) and piece together the events of that mysterious and dark matter.

Straub may not be everyone's cup of tea, but he's always been one of the most original voices of modern horror fiction. *A Dark Matter* is definitely worth diving into for fans of more literary horror, but this reader wouldn't recommend this to first-time readers.

Bookmarks Magazine says

Six book critics venture into a new novel by a best-selling horror writer. The writer is said to have magical abilities to blend horror conventions with literary fiction to keep the pages turning. He is even said to have touched Stephen King! Four of the critics come away convinced that a transcendent supernatural event has occurred, which may have something to do with the nature of evil. But two are horribly scarred by the event--unbearably bored, convinced they have just read a rejected script from *Lost*. Whose version of events is true? We may never know. All critics agree on is that the only possible way to describe such a plot structure is to reference Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon*--so readers may just have to investigate for themselves. This is an excerpt from a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

Wanda says

Years after performing a forbidden ritual during which a group of young people are brought in contact with "unspeakable evil" by a guru in 1966, the protagonist, Lee Harwell, reminisces about that night and its sequelae. The incident is set among the swirl of the 1960's college life in Madison, Wisconsin, and those heady days of Vietnam, predatory gurus, and post teen age angst infuse the narrative. To perform this supernatural ritual, eight people go into a meadow, six come out alive. One body is found mutilated in the grass and one person simply disappears without a trace and the guru takes off leaving the remaining youngsters to sort out what is the wreckage of the rest of their lives.

As these genre's go, the police are helpless and hapless in the face of unspeakable evil. The book shifts between Harwell's jagged memories and attempts to understand and the meanderings of Hootie, the survivor who has lost his mind. Hootie spouts endless literary allusions to that night and his present disorganized state.

By the time that we get to the denouement we really don't care, because this book is essentially a typical "let's ponder the vast realm of evil beyond our understanding" convention.

This was my third attempt at liking this author's work. I had given him a try with and without Stephen King a few decades ago. At the urging of the Philadelphia Inquirer's book critic, I decided to give him another chance. Bleh! This is the third and last time. He has failed every time to engage my interest. I really tried to give his work another chance and now I am upset at having wasted my time.

I found this book to be boring and derivative. The writing was self-conscious and annoying – I want to be compelled, frightened, and horrified when I read this genre, not have to struggle with stream of consciousness and having to understand endless literary allusions.

Nick says

Lee Harwell is a writer with writer's block and a detective's need to uncover just what happened to his wife and her friends in a meadow in the 1960's. There was a guru, a ritual, and, at the end of the night, a dismembered body. Harwell's wife, Lee Truax, has been obstinately silent about the events of that night. Thus, the story is the unraveling of these mysterious events as Harwell contacts the other people who were in the meadow that fateful night.

Many of the disappointed reviews I saw were from Straub fans. Perhaps I liked it more than I would have if I had certain expectations going in. I found the ending to be fairly satisfactory. There are areas I'm fuzzy about...but just enough to keep me guessing. The characters are developed well. The mystery was intriguing. The running discussion about the nature of evil was interesting--if somewhat flawed. But in the end I felt that it was a bit lacking. I got to the climax and didn't feel that it lived up to the build up. Quite. At the same time, he still has me thinking about what it all meant, so maybe I'll figure out the missing pieces soon and bring it all together.

It's obvious that Peter Straub is a gifted storyteller. I'll make sure to check out some of his other stuff at a later point.

Peggy says

This review originally appeared at RevolutionSF.com:

It was 1966 in Madison, Wisconsin. A group of teens fascinated with a self-proclaimed guru named Spencer Mallon agree to participate in a ritual with him. By the time it's over, one of them has disappeared, one of them is insane, one is going slowly blind, one has been literally torn apart, and all have been altered. Years later, the only member of their group of friends who wasn't there, now a successful writer, tracks down his old friends and gets them to tell their versions of what happened that night.

Recalling Rashomon, each story differs in the details, and those differences give us insights into the characters telling the story. Also like Rashomon those differences and what they reveal about the characters is more important to Straub than illuminating exactly what happened that night and what it all means, so if you're only interested in linear storytelling with concrete conclusions, you'll want to look somewhere else. But if you're a "the journey is more important than the destination" type, you'll find a lot here to enjoy.

The prose itself is fluid without being flowery, and the pacing is very consistent. The characters themselves are both the greatest strength and the greatest weakness of the novel. Some characters shine: bitter, empty Meredith Bright is just as chilling in her way as nascent serial killer Keith Hayward.

And Howard "Hootie" Bly is a revelation. He was so undone by the incident that he retreated into madness, able to communicate only by quoting from various books, mostly Hawthorne. Hootie's innate gentleness and goodness is as clear and effective as Meredith Bright's emptiness. Straub's affection for Hootie is clear, and it's well nigh impossible not to agree.

Because so much of the information is filtered through one character (Lee Harwell, the writer), it's sometimes hard to get a grasp on the others in the group, or to know if a description or insight is objectively true, or merely Lee's opinion. This adds yet another Rashomon-layer to the story, but leaves the reader a bit

adrift.

The other big problem for me was the character of Spencer Mallon. We're told about Mallon: he's devilishly handsome, he's ridiculously charismatic, he inspires devotion bordering on adoration from the group; but (barring a couple of glimpses by Lee that may or may not be Mallon, since he never met him when they were young) we never experience that charisma for ourselves. This may have been a conscious choice by Straub; we're in the same boat as our narrator, who only knows Mallon by what he's been told. But given that Mallon is another survivor of the incident, one can only wonder what his version of that night would have looked like.

So if you're looking for a straight-up, good-vs-evil, good wins in the end horror story, you probably won't be happy with what you find here. But if you're interested in good writing, layers of meaning, and a meditation on how what we see and remember often says more about us than about what we've seen, then you should give *A Dark Matter* a look.

DeAnna Knippling says

I get that not everyone will like this book. But it is, in my opinion, one of the highest works of art that I've read in a very long time.

The end of the book, like something written by Gene Wolfe (or, for that matter, David Wong), doesn't actually happen at the end of the book, but previously. And so you may come to the last few pages and...

...feel as though you've been cheated out of a proper ending.

All I can say is that this book is not for you.

I plan to study and reread this. It is magnificent.

(view spoiler)

Harry Kane says

I read *A Dark Matter* in 2011, and it was magnificent. In 2012, I revisited it from time to time, re-reading favorite scenes. These days, end of May – start of June 2013, I re-read it again from cover to cover. It's still magnificent. It is not only awesome, it is awe-inspiring.

Let me rephrase that: I think this is the best English-speaking book written in the start of the 21-st century. Pre-WWII it was Fitzgerald, post WWII it was Kingsley Amis, post-2000 it's Peter Straub with his *Dark Matter*. It's not a Great American novel; it's a Great Post-20th century novel, in the sense in which the 20th century starts in 1914 and ends in 2001. Or would have ended, had something taken its place, but that's another question entirely, and possibly something has taken its place, only I'm too near to see it.

Anyway, it's certainly better than any mature Wolfe, or DeLillo, or Roth.

A Dark Matter is a fitting culmination, a summary, a final bow to the 20th century as it was perceived by those who lived it, and as it was presented by those who wrote of it and made music about it. It is also a love letter to literature itself, especially the one on the border between 'ivory tower' and 'gutter', the tense, unstable border region which generates new life forms.

A Dark Matter is, in a sense, *The Great Gatsby* of the early 21st century. Only richer and more layered. It does not have the linear driving energy of the young and the drunk and the Fitzgeralds, but so what. It has its own identity. It's like Ross Macdonald didn't spread his talent out on a score of private eye pulps, but concentrated it in one deliciously tangled and messy, yet disciplined and focused, meta-tale of life and love and survival.

I love the structure, the themes, the characters, and the language of *A Dark Matter*. I love the issue of genuine vs borrowed language; the issue of does authenticity make one a force of nature and does this mean an independent moral value; the issue of love, loyalty, and 'down-to-earthness'. The issue of other worlds, be their forms 'real' or enforced by our inherited and learned matrixes, hovering on the edge of our shared trances. The issues of being one's own parent and one's own child.

I love the suspense, which is cerebral, not glandular. I love (and that goes for Mr. Straub's writing in general), how his 'horror' is a magical, awe-inspiring symphony with elements of stunning beauty balancing the elements of unease. I never feel queasy when reading his books. I never feel a false note in the prose.

Alone of his generation of authors, Straub peaked now. In my opinion, of course. Graham Masterton and James Herbert peaked almost instantly, in the late 70's. King and Koontz peaked in the late 80's. McCammon peaked around 1990. But Straub...Straub reached his dazzling heights in 2010 with *A Dark Matter*. So subdued and elegant, that the world didn't notice. Well, to hell with them. They'll notice, when the time comes, when they're ready.

I read a few criticisms of *A Dark Matter* in the sense of people dismissing it as a book based around a 'bad acid trip'. Meh. All religions, philosophical schools, political and social movements, and every plot ever, can be reduced to 'a good trip' or 'a bad trip'. And how does that help? How does that contribute? It only allows certain people to trumpet to the world 'see how smart I am! How perceptive! Adore me, instead!'

I will not elaborate on the critics who thought the novel is too slow and too convoluted. Let them read their Patterson/Brown thrillers.

A Dark Matter is an event a bit like the invocation in the meadow described within. An event that changed the world, but only for a few seconds, and without anyone noticing.

Well, I noticed. Thank you very much, Mr. Straub.
