



Readers' Favorite[®] **Book Reviews and Award Contest**

Circle of Innocents - Stephen D Curtis

Reviewed by Asher Syed for Readers' Favorite

Circle of Innocents by Stephen D. Curtis is an intricate supernatural thriller about a traumatized man named Wayne Terry, haunted by a childhood incident and under the influence of a nefarious entity, The Puppeteer. Simultaneously, businesswoman Joanne and her daughter Samantha grapple with strange phenomena, hinting at The Puppeteer's influence. The narrative also introduces Detective Chief Inspector Chris Ryan, who, after being shot, discovers he is an "Innocent," a protector of a chosen mother and her unborn child. Chris's mother, Anne Ryan, anxiously supports her son while grappling with her own fears. As the story evolves, the lives of Joanne, Samantha, Chris, Anne, and Wayne intertwine in an eerie dance of destiny, driven by a web of supernatural encounters, past traumas, and chilling revelations. The looming menace of The Puppeteer, and the protagonists' struggle against their internal and external demons, sets the stage for a gripping climax.

Circle of Innocents takes the spectral underbelly of human experiences and turns it into horror in the best possible way. Stephen D. Curtis knows the value of shock but is restrained in how frequently it is applied so that the tension extends until it feels like it might snap. At its core, the novel is a powerful portrayal of the human struggle with past scars and the continual battle with inner demons, with Wayne being the most put-on in this regard. He sure does not make it easy to feel sorry for him though, and I never could even under the looming presence of The Puppeteer. This enigmatic antagonist functions as a metaphor for manipulative forces in life, subtly influencing character decisions and their respective emotional landscapes. Curtis holds a mirror up to a reader, and while entertaining, don't expect it to be pretty. The grit and violence are massive. There is the reward of a spectacular twist when one character realizes and figures out that a prophecy is bigger than they are and as a parent that was a tough pill to swallow. Readers who like paranormal horror with a side of psychological exploration and a few mommy/daddy issues will love this novel, as I have. Beware of extreme violence and a night or two of sleeping with the lights on.