



# Dark Property

*Brian Evenson*

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A woman carries a dying baby across a desert waste, moving toward a fortress harboring a mysterious resurrection cult. Menaced by scavengers, she nevertheless begins to suspect that the reality within the fortress may be even more unsettling than the blasted environment outside. As she slips unobtrusively towards the city of the dead, she is pursued by a bounty hunter who cuts a bloody swath after her. On one level, *Dark Property* is an exploration of religious fanaticism. Although Evenson's characters owe more to the Book of Mormon than the Koran, their frightening intensity will spark recognition in both reviewers and readers. This brooding tale is reminiscent of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* and J. G. Ballard's more disturbing works of fiction. "I admire Evenson's writing and respect his courage." — Andrew Vachas

## Dark Property Details

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Author : Brian Evenson

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## From Reader Review Dark Property for online ebook

### Marc says

I'm not sure how, but I'd somehow missed this one despite being told that it was not to be missed by more than one fellow Evenson fan. (Happy to report that I've since rectified the problem.) The language used in this short but intense book is quite archaic and creates a very interesting effect. Evenson has said in one of his interviews that he was resurrecting words and expressions that had long been out of use, and indeed there are many strange phrases throughout. This just adds to the sense of displaced anxiety one feels in the world Evenson has herein created. Take, for example, such simple statements as: "The boy fremented as he ran." Or: "Her fingers crossed into the dripple." Or take the following (partial) description of a corpse (p. 41):

"The head lolled, swung forward, the flesh atop the slit throat slapping over the flesh below. The loop of rope ticked over each rib, dragged upward into the armpits. The stiff arms lifted, as if in slow benediction."

There is, as is to be expected in any work by Evenson, a lot of violent imagery described in a very matter-of-fact fashion, devoid of didacticism or judgment. Those familiar with *Last Days* will no doubt recognize the name Kline (who seems to be the "same" character as in that novel mainly in spirit; both have "blood on their hands," lots of it, and a sort of God-complex). In terms of plot, well yes... There is indeed a plot, but it seems secondary to the style and the imagery and the decidedly bleak atmosphere, so I won't summarize or give any of the action away. As others have mentioned, the narrative describes a dystopia reminiscent of some of Cormac McCarthy's work, but it is, ultimately, pure Evenson.

Consider the following interaction (p. 107) between Kline and a man he encounters late in the novel who goes by the name Eckels:

"Women are not property," said the man.  
"All are property," said Kline.  
The man leaned in.  
"Then you too are property. To whom do you belong?"

Later in the exchange:

"Truth cannot be imparted," said Kline. "It must be inflicted."

Can you guess what follows?

Though perhaps not as accessible as some of Evenson's more recent work, such as the excellent *Fugue State*, this will appeal to fans of dark dystopian literature full of rich language and imagery. Though it is short, it is worth several close readings. If you already a fan of Evenson's other work, this one should be added to your list. If not, start with *Last Days* or one of the short story collections such as *The Wavering Knife* or *Contagion*, and then check this out.

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### Mark Desrosiers says

I think I let this slip off my lap in the bus aisle once during a soured post-gig bus trip, and a kindly gent

handed it back to me: "hey HEY, keep your LITTrature on your person!" [laugh]. This was a squalorous time for me, and I think the squalid book and I just kept mocking each other until I was saved by a Mother's Day Butchies gig at the Dinkytowner a couple weeks later (but then I was almost killed by some bus tires later that night).

I should probably reread it.

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### **Adam Rodenberger says**

I got turned on to Evenson's work via his short story collection "Fugue State," which I really enjoyed. It was dark, it was well written, and kept me thoroughly engaged throughout.

"Dark Property," however, is a different animal altogether. One can only compare it to the darkest parts of Cormac McCarthy's oeuvre, both in use of sparse language and intentionally incorrect words whose intentional meaning is immediately obvious. A quick read at just 134 pages, I first believed the story to be about the initial woman carrying her dead child through the wilderness while avoiding several men who were more inclined to attack and rape her rather than help her along her way.

Then Evenson directs his attention to Kline, one of these men who is so unbelievably dark and sociopathic as to be genuinely frightening. Kline is some kind of (unexplained) bounty hunter of sorts, bringing kidnapped and violated women to a strange commune on the outskirts of the land. What they do to the bodies of these women (and also to the infant) is both grotesque and fascinating in its imaginative scope.

While I loved Evenson's use of language, I really wanted more explication of plot. All the moving pieces found within the pages are fantastic and more than interesting, but I was left wondering "what is everyone's purpose?" at the end. I didn't quite understand Kline's role in relation to the commune, a place that was also unfortunately devoid of any real explanation and more clarification on both of these points would've really fleshed out the story in some amazing ways.

Regardless, I've got more Evenson on my shelf to read and I'm super stoked to get into them all.

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### **Ramon says**

I mean, this wasn't even my favorite Brian Evenson book, but the guy's a faultless horror stylist. Detailed dissections, severed limbs/toes, something like 4 strangulations, baby-eating, and at least one occurrence of the word "Gloam". Evenson's talent is to shelve away interiority in favor of intricately detailed action, slight dialogue, and insanely esoteric verbiage (at least five trips to the dictionary came up empty - APTOTE?!).

Seriously, like ZERO interiority, it's pretty impressive. Any writer interested in the art of showing could do worse than study Bri-bri, but be prepared for some GORE, dude, holy shit. I actually gagged once.

Besides that it's your basic nameless-woman-marches-across-desert-towards-a-city-where-constantly-resurrected-men-named-Eckley-can-revive-the-dead-baby-in-her-backpack-while-she-is-also-being-chased-by-a-bounty-hunter-specializing-in-recovering-lost-wives-and-permanent-death. So...

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### **Kyle Muntz says**

Probably Evenson's most unrelentingly brutal book. The whole thing is uniformly bleak, cruel, with eventual hints of occultism. (Which is probably where there have been so many comparisons to the Road even if this book is technically older.) Evenson's absurdist dialogue and vertiginous landscapes are in full force, but what especially surprised me was how stylized this book is. The geography of the sentences reminded me a little of Dhalgren-era Delany, maybe the clipped sentences Joyce used in Ulysses: intensely lean, percussive, verb driven writing in a language mostly like English but transformed in very peculiar ways. The use of archaisms and strange vocabulary was (thankfully) more subdued than Clockwork Orange, Cloud Atlas, or that ridiculous first section from Alan Moore's "Voices of the Fire," and reminded me a little of Wolfe's Book of the New Sun with how alien but simultaneously familiar it was. I especially appreciated the strange, incomprehensible rituals that made up so much of the late novel, and how impermanent the death that filled every level of the novel really seemed to be.

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### **Kathryn says**

This is the story of a woman and a man. The woman is traveling through a bleak and disturbing setting. The man is purposeful and determined. I cannot say anything more about this book, as doing so would give too much away. I bought my copy without reading a single blurb but I am a huge fan of the author's and am confident in forever doing so.

Evenson makes me awestruck. His writing is as if from another time, at least so far as *Dark Property* is concerned. The story was surreal and painful to read. And though I am in awe of this book, I can not rate it the 5 stars it might deserve. I became lost in the setting and confusion over what was happening. I had no idea what was going on, where the characters were, why they were doing what they were doing, until at least half way into the book. I'm sure this was intentional, but it did detract from my immersion. For a 128 page book, this is not good. Yet, for a 128 page book, it was difficult to read, the words Evenson chose extremely specific. He did not waste a single word. Zero frivolous explanations or descriptions or even what he seems to have considered as frivolous a single feeling expressed by the characters. Everything was action and reaction.

Some readers may claim the book, the writing, the choice of words, to be pretentious. I feel the purpose which Evenson wrote overshadows that observation. The beauty of his words sharply contrasted with the actions of his characters. When I first started, I imagined Evenson wrote the book, ending included, and then consulted his handy-dandy thesaurus and replaced the majority of common place words with obscure, old-fashioned choices. This is a large part of why I experienced such a difficult time loosing myself within the story at the start.

But the last half worked. And once I realized what was happening I could not help but love the book and appreciate what the author did here.

I realize few people have read this, which I find sad, but I can not resist some comments about the end,

which happens to be one of my favorite endings ever. SO please, please, please do not click on the spoiler unless you have read this book.

(view spoiler)

I suggest not reading this unless you have read *Last Days*. I am still debating whether or not the character of Kline in *Last Days* is the character of Kline in *Dark Property*. I think he is and the change is frightening.

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### **Ryan Chapman says**

I may give this book five stars in the future, but I need more time to fully understand what I've read. This is so out of my normal range of literary fiction, I feel a bit lost. What I can say: this book is approaching language in intriguing ways.

Let's say your novel's set in some vague apocalyptic landscape. All of the usual signifiers of country, colloquialism, and culture are gone. What is to constitute your third-person voice? You could go the biblical route, a la Cormac McCarthy in *The Road*, though this implies connotations you may prefer to avoid. What if, like Beckett, you used exact diction that acts as if all connotations were voided, leaving only the original denotation? Wouldn't that be a "truer" method, and a way to shirk the trappings of early-aught years writing styles? (As a metaphor, one could say it's akin to removing all those bellbottoms from 1970s scifi movies.)

Evenson writes in this style. It's challenging, and slowgoing, but so damn rewarding. *Dark Property* reveals its world in small steps, allowing the reader room to breathe, to cough, and get a little nervous. Once you realize why the young protagonist is carrying a dead baby in a backpack across a ruined landscape, well, you'll be glad the author gave you time to prepare yourself. And like the best novels of ideas, the questions raised here continue to develop in your head long after the last page.

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### **J.A. says**

What do you say when a book is a book like you've never seen before? Any comparison as metaphor will be too hollow, any author connection not loud enough. This is an incredible book. This book does everything with language. This book is a book to make other books cower.

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### **Kaila C says**

I enjoyed the authors writing style and use of language. It was really just amazing to read his style of writing. However, I did not feel much for the story. Maybe there was too much violence and things that were meant to purposely make you feel something. It felt too forced, too much of a desire for shock value. That for me, lead me to just go unfazed and then just me wanting to know the setting or the background to this book. I understood there would be a lot of violence, and a apocalypse theme, and some question of religion. However that was all the book felt like. It showed a question of moral and importance of survival..but it was done so much, it sorta got dull for me. To me at least, it felt as if it were shown in the same manner over and over again. For example it was easy to predict the characters actions and know that character would kill people left an right. It wasn't shocking, and I accepted right away that one of the characters just wasn't afraid

to kill people. It was gross and disgusting but soon became a "okay I get it! People eat each other and do horrible things to a persons body.BUT WHY?!? That there is this guy who kills people, so is anyone going to kill him? How did this whole thing start?" For me this book, I liked enough to read but I am not in love with it. Some might really love this book and by all means there is are some really strong things to like about this book. For me I just liked it and I gave 3 stars.

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### **Forrest says**

Even those brave readers familiar with Brian Evenson's often-macabre work will discover new depths of shadow in the pages of *Dark Property*. This may well be his most chilling book to date - not in the sense of stock horror, but as a more sophisticated frisson, an existential mix of confusion, anticipation, and stark cruelty.

The narrative follows a cadre of ruthless loners across a post-apocalyptic wasteland as they seek to possess and dominate one another's most cherished properties: their bodies. Evenson takes his notoriously clinical approach to brutality one step further into the experimental realm by employing a Lewis Carroll-esque mutation of the English tongue. He twists adjectives into verbs (and vice-versa), for example, injecting layers of meaning into single, loaded words. The result evokes a Dr. Seuss caught in the grip of some penumbral nightmare.

Not only is *Dark Property* a carefully stirred stew of language, but the plot also churns, boiling back in on itself as a series of rough characters chase, capture, abuse, kill, and sometimes resurrect one another in a seemingly endless factory line of violence. The main character, Kline, is an unemotional brute of a man who kills with as much passion as one might feel when doing the laundry or taking out the trash. Only Eckels, who refuses to stay dead for any length of time, effectively acts as Kline's foil. Eckels is a peaceful antagonist (one might argue that he is actually the protagonist, but this would be a moral decision, not a literary edict) whose purpose is to come back from the dead and question the murderer on his lack of conscience. The many deaths and returns of Eckels make the tale a clockwork of brutality, forgiving, fall, and redemption - wheels of words within wheels of character within wheels of plot. Indeed, Evenson may have been influenced by James Joyce in writing this novel; one might, in the tradition of Finnegans Wake, open *Dark Property* to any page and begin reading until the story loops back in on itself.

Simultaneously confusing, vivid, surreal, and clear, *Dark Property* is a challenging work - but one that, for readers who can lose themselves in its world and then pay careful attention to the surroundings once therein, yields a melange of beautifully stark, never-ending terror.

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### **David Peak says**

Not sure I entirely understood what was going on, or what was meant by what was going on, but the language here is Evenson at his absolute best.

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### **Ryan says**

The answer to the unasked question "what would you get if you merged Cormac McCarthy, Samuel Beckett,

and The Brother's Quay?"

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### **Adam says**

Evenson's Dark Property is described as post-apocalyptic but it is one of the abstract and bizarre examples of said genre pushed into a new category. A linguistic journey like Cormac McCarthy's Blood Meridian (its been wondered if this was an influence on The Road, which if it wasn't a trunk novel is possible) and Gene Wolfe's New Sun books, but its descriptions odd rituals, strange behaviors, and odd dialogues brings it closer to Beckett, with some twitching monstrosities worthy of Brothers Quay or Guy Maddin film. Mad and beautiful in equal measures.

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### **Brent Legault says**

In Dark Property, Brian Evenson invents a world where violent acts are not only second nature to the people in it, but they are their first thought. Violence replaces good manners. Whereas in our world two people meeting for the first time might shake hands or exchange kisses, Evenson's people stab and bludgeon each other, steal from each other, take fleshy trophies and more often than not, make meals of one another. The violence, as depicted by Evenson, is not sensational. It is work-a-day violence, graphic and mundane at the same time, and as seemingly necessary to his people as water or air. In fact, his people hardly even need water or air. They prefer the nourishment of pain, taken or given. But more interesting to me is what Evenson does with our language. He makes old verbs do new things. He broadens when it's best and narrows, too, when he finds it fit. And he manufactures! I only wish that some of the words (fremulous, strampled, flitch, vortic) Evenson created for his world would bleed into our own. He sets our language afire and bends the flames to his will, making even the ashes his own. He savages our tongue and sweetens it; eviscerates it while enlivening it. Dark Property is a minor work of mad-genius.

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### **Reacher says**

A short novel. I admire the prose. I would find it difficult to sustain more than a few pages of this style, let alone write an entire novel in it, plus do it with a consistent theme. The story/plot here is sparse, and not all that interesting. It's really about the prose. Not even sure I liked the style that much, but couldn't help being impressed by it. It taught me something too: that the hyper-descriptive-overload-of-adjectives-and-adverbs style actually has the opposite effect in that it allows practically no room for your imagination to breathe, so the result is that you (or at least, me) have a hard time visualizing anything that's being described. Often, I'd pull away from the book for a minute and try to think about what the characters actually looked like, or what kind of landscape this was, etc, and found I only had a vague idea. A great illustration of the 'more is less' principle.

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