



## The Hour of the Oxrun Dead

Charles L. Grant, David Mann (Cover Artist)

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## WELCOME TO OXRUN STATION

Oxrun station could be a spooky place, especially out by the Windsors', right next to the graveyard. At night Natalie heard eerie sounds out in the fog, among the tombstones, unnatural sounds made by unearthly things. Natalie's husband had been born in Oxrun Station. He loved the town, and served it well - and in return it killed him. Ben's death had left Natalie isolated in a strange town she could not call her own. How strange and how deadly Oxrun Station could be, Natalie Windsor was about to learn. Once each year an ancient ritual was recreated, an ancient pact reinvoked - and Natalie Windsor was this year's sacrifice.

## The Hour of the Oxrun Dead Details

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Author : Charles L. Grant , David Mann (Cover Artist)

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## From Reader Review The Hour of the Oxrun Dead for online ebook

### Graham P says

The first of the Oxrun series is a wet blanket of a novel. It's like reading a Nancy Drew cardboard potboiler tinged with the gothic--every small town has a cult seeking world domination, no? What is most memorable of 'The Hour of the Oxrun Dead' is that it contains one of the most nonsensical love affairs ever put to the page. Grant can lay on the atmosphere, and he passionately does so--the fog, the diffused lights, the prowler in the dark--but it seems like he was writing with one hand in the burgeoning horror market and the other in the tried & true romance genre. The amount of cock-teasing that goes on in this novel is of Mount Everest proportions. Here, if you just found out your friend is brutally murdered, what do you do? You flirt, go prance in the park, drop lustful innuendos, and then go get ice cream.

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### Christopher Fulbright says

THE HOUR OF THE OXRUN DEAD is an intriguing read, the first book in what would become an ongoing, disconnected series of books set in the fictional town of Oxrun Station. It is very subtle in its horror, with some gripping suspense and main characters you can like.

As with all of Charles Grant's gothic horror, the prose weaves a spell of almost surreal gloom. In a few places, in an attempt to weave that spell, the prose gets awkward, with strange analogies that make you stop and have to think about them. That said, this is a minor gripe, as the book is very well written overall. In re-reading this book after 20-something years, it was much more readable as an adult than I found it as a teen. In fact, I eagerly read as many pages as time allowed in each sitting, and forged ahead to the end with a driving need to know what would happen.

A previous reviewer complained that the book needed some "80s decadence" to place it more firmly in its time. I have to disagree. The book was written in the mid to late 70s. As such, it is very much on par with other books of its time. Though it came almost a decade years later, I found myself thinking it was similar in some ways to Ira Levin's ROSEMARY'S BABY, leaning on the occult mystery, strange hinted-at conspiracies, and suspense to drive the story ahead. The 70s were full of novels that attempted to re-capture that creepy sense of occult horror Levin achieved, and this (intentionally or unintentionally) was one of them.

My only real gripe with the book was that I felt the conclusion was too brief. All of the elements didn't seem to come completely together and adequately explain, to my mind anyway, all that was going on in the town. Granted, not everything \*has\* to be explained in detail, so it wasn't a deal killer, just a personal feeling when I came to the end. I still really liked this book a lot, and enjoyed reading it so much I'd recommend it without hesitation to anyone with an interest in horror of the "creeping suspense" variety, in that late-1960s and 1970s style.

Charles Grant deserves to be remembered for his work in the genre, not only as an author, but as an editor. Other books by Grant that I'd recommend include THE PET, and his short story collection TALES FROM THE NIGHTSIDE. I also highly recommend the SHADOWS series, which he edited from the late 1970s through the 1980s.

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## Mark says

It was Grady Hendrix that made me do it.

Inspired by his *Paperbacks From Hell* summary of the 1970's and 80's Horror boom, I decided to read a book that I'd had around for a while, one that was a breakthrough novel from an author who's a "writer's writer".

You may not've heard of Charles L Grant before, even though he's widely regarded by those writers "in the know". He's one of those authors who amassed novels and sales while getting on with the job of writing during his lifetime without too much fuss, until his death in 2006. Stephen King, on writing about Charles, said that he was a professional:

*"The one thing that does (and I suppose the stories also say this, but it is worth pointing out) can be summed up in five words of one syllable, none of them longer than three letters. It doesn't take long to write or to say, but from where I sit, those five words say about everything that needs to be said: The man was a pro."*  
(Stephen King, *Scream Quietly*, PS Publishing, 2012)

It is often from fellow writers that the plaudits appear. Charles won a World Fantasy Award for his novella collection *Nightmare Seasons*, a Nebula Award in 1976 for his short story "A Crowd of Shadows", and another Nebula Award in 1978 for his novella "A Glow of Candles, a Unicorn's Eye". He was also the editor of the *Shadows* book collections from book 1 – 10 (1978-1987).

To many though, even genre readers, his name will not be recognised – his closest brush with fame and recognition is probably the two *X-Files* tie-in novels he wrote, *Goblins* (1994) and *Whirlwind* (1995). (Which I read at the time they were published and thought that they were just OK.)

With *The Hour of the Oxrun Dead* we're reading Charles' work from near the start. This breakthrough novel was the imaginary setting for many of his short stories and novels. Oxrun Station is typical "little-America", a small-town place (described in the book as "a town that's really a small village") that perhaps Ray Bradbury and Stephen King have passed from time to time. Like Bradbury's Green Town or King's Derry, there's a lot going on beneath the deceptively placid surface. It's rather like *Peyton Place* on the way to the underworld. (Fans of Buffy's Sunnydale might recognise it too.)

This story concerns itself with near-thirty something Natalie Windsor (nee Clayton), librarian. (See, you like her already!) Her husband, policeman Ben, was killed about a year ago in a gruesome manner. Since then Natalie has been a grieving widower, constantly watched over by Ben's brother Sam (also a policeman) and her ex-sister in law, trying to get on with her life and her job. Her work colleagues are also solicitous and generally as expected – haughty boss Adriana Hall, nosy oldster Arlene Bains and young, vivacious Miriam Burke. Now a series of other grisly deaths, and in similar ways, suggest that, even with the original killer dead, something strange is a-stirring in Oxrun.....

First thought on reading is how Stephen King-like this is. (Less informed readers may think that *Oxrun Dead* is a deliberate King-imitator, but it is worth remembering that by 1977, the year of publication, Charles

already had published over twenty short stories and another novel, and Stephen was just releasing his third novel, *The Shining*. Similar style, but not copyists.)

The most-striking thing is the emphasis on prose and plot. Throughout the novel there's a clarity of prose that is quite refreshing. Even when the writer gives description, it is eloquent without being over-florid:

*"THE LIBRARY still seemed spring-new after four New England years. A red-brick rectangle, it was fronted by two-story arcs of polarized glass weekly washed and giving it a distinctly churchlike appearance. Surrounding the building were three narrow concentric aprons of white concrete that served as footpaths between wire-braced saplings of birch and willow. Four large squares of lush grass still a summer green stretched from the steps to the sidewalk and were bordered by redwood benches, today occupied by several elderly men bundled in grey and brown and playing checkers. Natalie had never understood why they didn't prefer the municipal park that began only one block further on, but she liked to believe it was the stimulation of proximity to her books. Soon enough, however, the weather would add an uncomfortable dampness to its autumn bite and like aged birds too weary for migration, the men would retreat inside to one of the reading rooms off the main lobby where the warmth more often than not would put them quickly to sleep until closing."* (Chapter 2)

*"At the end of the street was a low cyclone fence topped with a double strand of barbed wire. During the growing seasons it was camouflaged by untended shrubbery and several massive willows; during fall and winter it was slightly imposing—less for its size than the clearly visible expanse of carefully mown grassland that stretched for over a hundred yards toward the newest section of the Oxrun Memorial Park. Sans moonlight, the tombstones and scatterings of ornate mausoleums were invisible, and with the sun the closest seemed only to be nothing more than sculptured boulders."* (Chapter 2)

40 years on from the book's first publication, there are elements that may jar a modern reader. There's no talk of mobile phones or social media and very little about computers – home computers are still a few years away. (How easy these stories would be to sort with a mobile phone and the Internet!) Instead, we get a place where newspapers are still a prime source of information, newspaper copy is typed up on a typewriter, sometimes with carbon paper, and libraries use index cards for referencing. There's a pleasant buzz of nostalgia for older readers but it may as well be a different planet for younger readers.

On the positive side, the characterisation of Natalie and her friend Marcus (Marc) Clayton is surprisingly good, though these days may be seen as predictable. Admittedly they can tend towards the cliched, and are not there entirely for their navel-contemplating capabilities, but there's enough there to make the reader care. Natalie, despite her issues, is not the weak-willed victim as much as the stereotype would have us believe, although it must be said that she has her moments. By turns, her long-term friend Marc is good-humoured, dependable and acts as honourably as anyone who has been holding a torch for someone for an eon does. Their dialogue is charming and realistic:

*"You know," he said, hugging himself as he wandered back toward the counter, "I never did see what anyone would want with a mausoleum like this." He stared up at the darkness above the light, glanced at the shadows of books and magazines on the racks to the right of the desk. "I mean, libraries are no fun anymore. No dust, no snoring old men at the newspaper table, things like that." When he reached the counter, he picked up a portion of the printout and waved it. "See what I mean? Computers and everything. Whatever*

*happened to that rotten old lady who wouldn't let me read anything in the adult section because it would warp my impressionable little mind?"*

*"You're looking at her," Natalie said mock sternly. "Only, I don't particularly think of myself as rotten."*

By comparison, the bad guys (and yes, they are mainly guys) of the novel are a little less fleshed out. More of a caricature, they look and act like we expect bad guys to do, almost hissing and snarling in the shadows like pantomime villains. It's also never really explained why the things that happen have decided at this moment to appear, although we can always blame it on Halloween, I guess.

By the end of the book it all turns a little *Rosemary's Baby*, with the creepy local family, under a veneer of manners and societal moirés, dominating local society circles and clearly up to no good. After such a great set-up, the weakest part of the novel for me was the ending, which is rather abrupt. The strange events that happen to that point are not explained nor entirely resolved. It feels that there should be more, though this may be taken up in future stories in the series.

Nevertheless, despite this, *The Hour of the Oxrun Dead* is a pleasant surprise. The development of character and place, through the plot, up to the conclusion allows the suspense to build throughout, to the point near the end when I was reluctant to put the book down. It's also unexpectedly subtle in parts and not the gore-fest I was rather expecting.

And, as events in the novel come to a head at Halloween, you know that I'm going to recommend this as a read for this time of year. It's perhaps not quite the work of an Award winner – yet. But the signs are there, and it means that I'm going to hunt out more by this author. It's taken me a while to read his work, but I'm pleased I got there. (If you can't find the paperback, there's a very cheap copy available for Kindle!)

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### **James Adams says**

I've been a fan of Charles Grant, and his Oxrun Station stories, for a long while now, but this is the first of the Oxrun novels I've read, and I liked it. A lot.

Grant was a leading proponent of the quiet horror movement, the more restrained counter to splatterpunk. He viewed quiet horror as more based in atmosphere and character, as opposed to violence and gore. There can, of course, be a balance between the two schools, but that's an argument for another time. Still, his emphasis was often on character, and that certainly shows here.

Natalie, the widow at the center of this story, is strong and independent, moving on with her life eighteen months after her husband's passing. In her work at the library, she begins noticing strange things, as does her potential beau, a reporter.

Again, the emphasis is mostly on atmosphere, which Grant did well. There are strong, creepy moments here, times when I didn't even know I was holding my breath until it shuddered out of me.

What surprised me was how well-drawn the characters were. You laugh with them, care about them and mourn for them. They are strong enough to pull you through despite the slower pace.

The relationship between Natalie and Marc is a high point. Now, I don't much care for romance in my novels, but these two are such real people that it's hard not to get pulled in. The fact that Marc never takes center stage away from Nat certainly helps.

All in all, a fine novel, and I'll be returning to Oxrun Station soon.

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## Randolph says

Lots of fun in the first Oxrun Station novel. Engaging quirky "normal" suburban characters acting totally insane so we can get a story (just run away from Oxrun Station for heaven's sake). Tell me you don't like Natalie and Marc and I'll prove you have no heart. The payoff turns out to be less menacing, in my opinion, than the buildup, but it is a fun roller coaster ride nonetheless. Kudos for Grant not loading us with a lot of post-climax BS about the protagonists' future life. Quit while you are on top.

Listening to Babylon's Burning by The Ruts.

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## Michael says

I'd never heard of Charles L. Grant, until he died in 2006. Shortly after his death, Cemetery Dance ran a tribute issue to him, devoting two or three story slots to unpublished horror tales he'd written, and quite a bit of laudatory essays and personal accounts from his friends and fans. During his life, he'd been known more for his influential horror anthologies in the 80s, which according to many of the authors featured in the Cemetery Dance tribute issue, offered a haven for more subtle horror that did not depend on gore or extreme violence or gimmicky sci-fi for its entertainment value. I was not too thrilled with his short stories I read in Cemetery Dance but the praise his fellow genre authors spouted, and a quote from Stephen King calling Grant "the premier horror writer of his or any generation" compelled me to pick up an old paperback copy of one of the more popular novels set in his signature Oxrun Station.

The Hour of the Oxrun Dead is a subtle novel of terror, vacillating between a sense of mounting paranoia and the possibility of some real occult activity in sleepy Oxrun Station, a Connecticut village, a haven for small town provincial and a bedroom community for commuters. Natalie, a young, sexy librarian (they only exist in novels and movies, it seems) is the widow of Ben, a police officer in Oxrun who is murdered soon after he and Natalie marry. For some reason, Natalie feels the need to stay in Oxrun, a town that offers her little else but job security, even though she has gotten over the pain of Ben's loss. She starts falling for a young beat reporter for the local weekly paper, Marc, and together they begin to come up with what seem to be grand delusions about the town's upper crust establishment. Grant manages to create a comfortable, almost cozy bit of suburban horror with his very familiar setting and cast of characters - the creepy police chief, the corrupt banker, the old craggy innkeeper, the wicked head librarian, the megalomaniac millionaire. But the implications of the "plot" Natalie and Marc imagine some horrible small town cult enacting don't cross the boundaries of this sleepy little village. In the end, who cares what these folks do with Natalie and Marc. They lose all of their likability when Grant has them frolicking and flirting through the cemetery directly after the funeral of one of Natalie's only friends.

Oxrun Station has the odd, doomed quaintness of Stephen King's Derry or Castle Rock, which is an easy trope for a writer of horror in the 80s. There's no sense of the time period, however, in The Hour of the Oxrun Dead, no sense of an innocent yet excessive mid-80s decadence, which could spruce up the somewhat banal story. The supernatural elements of the novel seem psychological, a quiet muffled background conversation heard behind a tedious plot, like Argento's Suspiria but with little of the physical beauty and grandeur. There's still a tradition of quiet horror, both in literature and cinema, which combats the torture porn aesthetic of movies like Saw and books like Palahniuk's Haunted or the bizarro sub-genre. If Grant is

responsible for bringing this approach intact through the 80s, we should thank him for it. I think to understand his true impact on horror, it might be important to read the anthologies he edited and is best known for and let his novels sit on the shelf.

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### **Rebecca McNutt says**

There are many generic copycat mass-market books out there in the world, and this one is a classic example. It had an alright plot but boring characters and a predictable chain of events.

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### **Jon Recluse says**

Charles L. Grant proved that a whisper can echo longer than a scream and forever set the bar for quiet, atmospheric horror when he introduced readers to Oxrun Station.

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### **Kyle Blount says**

This is the first Grant novel that I read. It was great. Heavy on atmosphere and character development, the novel shies away from cheap scares. I've read a lot of Ramsey Campbell and this style is much more in that school than say Barker or King. I think I've heard it referred as "Quiet Horror". Regardless, much recommend! Will definitely dive into another Charles L. Grant novel soon.

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### **Jordan West says**

3.5; some aspects of the novel are thoroughly dated, and the ending is abrupt even by Grant's standards, but still well worth reading for the wonderfully eerie and understated atmosphere, which is perhaps comparable in tone and effectiveness to a Val Lewton film.

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### **Redrighthand says**

This was my first book by Charles Grant and while it was very light on chills, it was an enjoyable story. More than any creepy atmosphere I had expected from reading reviews, the two main characters' relationship was what I found to be most charming. Character driven narrative and romance are not normally what I hope to find when I pick up a book, so this was surprising. It was a nice palate cleanser.

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## **Kimberly says**

This is the first in a series of books set in the fictional town of Oxrun Station. If you are looking for splatter punk, or excessive gore, this is NOT that type of horror. Charles Grant has an incredible style that emphasizes the building of oppressive atmosphere, and developing strong characterization. I will admit that the "climax" was rather brief in relation to the build-up; but I felt that this was perfect for the type of tale that this novel set forth. The mounting dread was almost tangible in places, and made this story--for me--one that I read in a single day. I simply did not want to separate myself from the characters until their journey was done. In my opinion, a great example of "classic" horror from one of the true masters of the craft.

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## **Tobin Elliott says**

Most of the time, if I've read a book two or three decades previously, I'll usually remember the gist of the plot and two or three specific scenes. That wasn't the case with this novel. I could remember nothing of it, so reading it again, I was essentially reading it for the first time.

The first thing that struck me was the writing. Languid, well-constructed, beautifully written. Very much in the Ray Bradbury vein. That's a huge plus.

The second thing is, Grant is prepared to take his time and make you wait for stuff. Again, not a bad thing. As long as there's payoff at the end, a slow build can be a wonderful thing.

Now, while this novel was marketed firmly in the horror genre, I felt it was really only peripherally horror. It was very much more a mystery with horror undertones. In fact, until the last 20-30 pages, it really didn't have much in the horror area either. The entire book was quite successful in conveying the thinly-veiled threat of ruling body of Oxrun Station, but most of the time, that was it, only threats.

And then there's the areas I ended up pulling stars off for, that I must hide under a spoiler tag:  
(view spoiler)

Like I said, a slow build can be a wonderful thing if the payoff at the end warrants it. In this case, it more felt like Grant had written himself into a corner, had a word limit he couldn't surpass, and shut it down quick. So, in the end, it was a well-written, but poorly plotted novel, but it's only the first in the loosely-connected Oxrun Station series, so I'll give a few more a go.

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## **Ken McKinley says**

You could tell Grant was starting to come into his own with *The Hour of the Oxrun Dead*. The writing was much better than *The Curse*. The atmosphere that he sets has a nice slow build up of dread. In *The Curse*, the

female characters were amazingly shallow and annoying. While they were better in this story, the main character still puts herself in stupid situations. Oddly enough, I've read a few other authors whose novels that were written in the 1970s and they had the same type of female characters that are portrayed as shallow and dim-witted. Coincidence? I'll let you decide. The dialog was also a bit sketchy in parts and the ending wasn't very satisfying. Overall, I felt this was a step ahead of The Curse and I look forward in seeing if Grant's progress continues in Last Call of Mourning.

3 out of 5 stars

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### **DJMikeG says**

This was the first novel I've read by the late, esteemed Mr. Grant. He was a very talented writer. His writing oozes atmosphere. The setup and basically the first two thirds of the book were fantastically creepy and interesting. I wasn't wild about the climax, it felt kind of rushed after all that slow burn and brilliant setup. Still, I guess this was Mr. Grant's first novel and his writing improved hereafter. As a first novel its incredibly impressive. I definitely enjoyed this and look forward to reading more novels by Grant. Perfect October reading.

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