



## Darkness All Around

*Doug Magee*

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## **Darkness All Around** Doug Magee

When there's DARKNESS ALL AROUND . . . some memories are best forgotten

Within the span of one harrowing week, Risa's alcoholic husband, Sean, disappears, and her best friend, Carol, is brutally murdered. Eleven years later, Risa has seemingly put her life back together again, comforted by the love of her new husband, who is a local politician, and the knowledge that Carol's killer has been convicted. But then just as suddenly as he disappeared, Sean resurfaces—sober, plagued by horrific recollections of Carol's murder, and convinced he was the real killer.

Sean's startling claim buzzes through the small, football-crazy Pennsylvania community, and Risa is left to wonder if the man she still loves actually committed the grisly murder. Her growing belief in his innocence sends her on a treacherous search for the truth: a search that reveals ugly secrets that her new husband and the town's law enforcement community are hiding.

Emboldened by her discoveries, Risa convinces Sean to flee as the town's violent forces move in to keep the truth from coming to light. But Risa doesn't realize that her attempts to get vindication for Sean may come at a very high price.

Part murder mystery, part love story, *Darkness All Around* is a gripping exploration of the depths of the criminal mind, the fine line between the truth and a lie, and the bravery of the human heart.

## **Darkness All Around Details**

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Author : Doug Magee

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### Zohar - ManOfLaBook.com says

Darkness All Around by Doug Magee is a mystery novel taking place in a small town. Besides the mystery which the story centers around, the book also captures the neurosis feel of small town politics.

Eleven years after Risa's best friend was murdered, her husband Sean comes back to town claiming he is the murderer. He was considered dead and the murderer has been caught, but such small details don't stop Sean from trying to prove his guilt.

The small Pennsylvania town is set ablaze when violent forces react to Sean's outrageous claims and mysterious return. Risa thinks something is not right with Sean's claim, but she is willing to help him out but doesn't realize the price she might have to pay.

Darkness All Around by Doug Magee is a different kind of thriller which will keep you guessing until the end. The book would make a great selection for a book club because of all that's happening, not only in the mystery arena, but also the psychology of the characters, their relationships and how they handle the challenges which constantly come up.

The pace of the book changes often, sometimes it's slow, the others lightning fast but the narrative kept up my interest regardless. Parts of the novel has an almost small-town claustrophobic feel to them, growing up in small towns and places where everyone knows your business within a few moments, I can appreciate the notion.

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### Kerri says

I just really could not get into this book very quickly. I tried and it had all the components to make a fascinating mystery, but it just never grabbed me like I wanted to be grabbed. I stuck it out and I liked the ending, but usually this type of book is one in which the pages fly by for me because I HAVE to know the solution. So it wasn't what I was looking for this time around.

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### Heather says

From grade school through high school, classmates Sean, Risa, and Alan are best friends who do everything together. But aspirations beyond college separate the threesome, and Sean and Risa pair off on their own. Soon Risa becomes pregnant, and Sean and Risa move back to their small hometown in Pennsylvania right after college graduation to await the birth of their son Kevin. When Sean's widowed father does the unthinkable—committing suicide and leaving everything he owns to the couple to give them the best possible start that he thinks they could have—their relationship begins a downward spiral when Sean starts drinking and quickly progresses into full blown alcoholism. It isn't uncommon for Sean to disappear for a few days at a time and to be drunk all of the time. Meanwhile, Alan has went to an Ivy League school with his sights set on a political career in Washington DC. He seems to have everything together with his life, and he has a hard time understanding why Risa would chose Sean over him.

In one tragic week, Sean's alcoholism hits its lowest when he disappears and doesn't come back, and Risa's best girlfriend Carol is found murdered near the bar she worked at (The bar's name is The Ding Dong, and it made me snicker every time I read that. Not sure if it was meant to be funny or not, but I laughed anyway). Alan swoops in, and after a few years he helps Risa get Sean declared dead when he doesn't come home. Now Alan and Risa are the picture of the perfect political family, and Alan even adopted Kevin. But Risa isn't very happy with the level of violence her son is showing in his promising high school football career, and she certainly doesn't like the life of being the wife of someone who is on the campaign trail to DC.

And then Sean shows back up in town, saying that he had amnesia when he was a homeless drunk and was hit by a subway train in New York City, but he now remembers one thing clearly—he murdered Carol.

Darkness All Around tells the story of how claustrophobic and suffocating small town life can be, and especially how at least one person always knows every little move you make. Growing up in a small town myself, I could totally relate, so I enjoyed this aspect of the book very much. But this book was so much more than the mystery of "Who killed Carol?" It's the story of how far will you go to protect the ones you love, and can you really trust the people that you see everyday? It also explores how memory loss and alcoholism can affect more than the person afflicted with it, and the struggles that arise for everyone.

I give this book a four out of five. Darkness All Around was a very quick read once you get past the first couple of chapters, which were a bit confusing since they took place eleven years in the past and you have to reason that out once you hit the chapters that are in the present day. But once you get going, this book was one that I didn't want to put down, and I certainly didn't guess the bad guy with this one. It kept me guessing all the way until the big reveal. I definitely recommend this one to thriller/mystery lovers who love a getting inside the heads of most of the main characters.

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## **Tori says**

It was good. I would have liked more of an explanation of why for the murder. Or maybe a peek into what happened that night...

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## **Ryan says**

When I was offered this book for review, I almost passed on it. I had read and reviewed the author's last book, *Never Wave Goodbye*, and I wasn't in love with it. I enjoyed it, but wasn't sure I liked it enough to give the author another look. To make the decision even harder was the fact that I had just given up on a book from an author I had given a second chance too. I wasn't really open to the idea of doing it again. For whatever reason, I ignored my doubts and jumped right in.

Every issue I had with *Never Wave Goodbye*, seemed to disappear in *Darkness All Around*. The narrative was tighter and more cohesive. The characters, because there were fewer of them, seemed to be solidier this time around. I was able to emotionally invest in Sean and Risa. I wanted and was able to root for them. I wanted them to be able to put the past behind them and carry on with their lives. I wanted them to work out why Sean thought he was the one who killed Carol. I went along for the ride, and I loved every moment of it.

Now I can't say that I was on pins and needles the entire book, but I do think that the author was able to build a tension that ebbed and flowed naturally. None of the action felt forced or driven too hard. It was a ride that would make me short of breath for a bit, then allow me to relax and get comfortable before giving me another adrenaline high. It was a solid addition to the suspense genre, and I'm looking forward to the author's next contribution.

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### **Audra (Unabridged Chick) says**

For a moment, I despaired ever really getting into this novel: the book opens with two brief chapters that were sort of vague, kind of flash back-y, and I felt my interest drifting before I could even figure out the story's hook. Then, thankfully, Magee zeroed in on his heroine and for me, the book got interesting.

While there's not a lot that's new in this book, what is offered is solid: the mystery is dark and twisted, the characters compellingly messed up, the tension creepy, and the setting claustrophobic. In a small, football-obsessed Pennsylvania town, Risa is married to a local politician, Alan, who is running for state office. Eleven years earlier, her alcoholic husband Sean disappeared and was eventually declared dead. Their son, Kevin, is the town's football star. One night, Sean returns to town, sobered up and recovering from a traumatic brain injury, and as his amnesia fades, he claims he remembers brutally murdering their friend. Understandably, Risa is kind of flipped.

I don't read a ton of these thrillers as I'm a big stress bucket and the anxiety of getting to the book's twist can render me a twitching idiot. However, Magee's book had a slow tension that I liked mixed with a kind of emotional exploration that really worked for me. Risa struggles not only with emotional impact of her declared-dead husband's return, but the potential of violence in the people she loves: her husband's addictive tendencies, her son's passion -- and skill -- at football, the implications of her current husband's involvement in the investigation of the murder and her ex-husband's past.

I'm totally over traumatic brain injuries as a plot device, and yet when it surfaced in this novel, it worked for -- and made for a rather compelling character. I'm not a football fan, either, but found the sports/violence angle interesting. (However, a character mentions in passing that Kevin might get some attention from Paterno at Penn State and the only reason I understood this reference was due to the abuse scandal.)

This was a perfect weekend read, easy for me to dip in and out of throughout the day. Creepy enough that I waved off friends to keep reading but effortless enough that I could get back into the story were my friends persistent and successful in pulling me away.

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### **Barbara says**

Darkness All Around

By Doug Magee

This book grips the reader right from the first page and keeps that grip tight until the last page. The plot is stronger than the character which feel a bit stereotyped. This is not a police procedural or an amateur detective mystery, just a woman trying to understand what happened to her life and her love. She lost her true love to drink and disappearance, but she married her second-best friend and has had a good marriage. He is good to her and good to her son.

She is consciously disturbed by the violence she sees in her son as he plays football and wonders if it is learned behavior or something more sinister. She learns her first love and former husband has returned and he is sober and claiming he killed her best friend before he disappeared. Her current husband, Mr Second Best, is a politician in the midst of an important campaign and the last thing he wants is the reappearance of the long declared dead husband who thinks he is a murderer. This plot line continues through the book, with twists and turns, complete with gun-happy crazies, chase scenes and unrequited love.

The climactic end is a little implausible, but it does not spoil the fun getting there. This is an especially good book to have along if you are on a long flight or sitting in the doctor's office because once you start, you won't want to put it down.

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### **Andrea Guy says**

Darkness All Around is a different kind of mystery. It certainly wasn't what I was expecting, but the read was definitely a pleasant surprise. What was different in this story is the relationship aspect. Most of the books in this genre that I've read seldom focus on the people involved. This isn't the case here, and that really almost takes away the whodunit from the story, especially as the whodunit is a case that's been closed for years.

I was drawn to the story because it is set in Pennsylvania. I'm from the state, so that's always a draw for me, but what kept me turning the pages were the characters. I loved Risa. You could tell there were some cracks in the marriage as the story starts out. Her politician husband is not easily likable to the reader.

So to say the outcome was a surprise would be a lie, however Doug's writing is engaging because he creates characters that you can relate to. I could almost see the newscasts about Alan's run for office and Kevin's drive for football glory.

The small town of Braden really comes alive too. No surprise that everyone knows everyone's business. Anyone that lives in a small town can tell you that.

It is the mystery that is a little bit ho hum, because the end of the prologue pretty much tells you who the killer is. I won't say what character said it..but "Maybe she deserved to die." isn't the typical remark from an innocent bystander

Sean is the real focal point of the story. You want to dislike him for the way he was; a not so good father, a violent drunk etc. But you can see a turnaround in him. You know he wasn't perfect but you like him anyway. You know that there's no way he could have played a part in killing Carol, even though things in his memory are telling him otherwise.

If the outcome weren't so predictable this would have been a perfect read, but it still was a great one and one that I would recommend to anyone that likes a little mystery in their life. I'd also recommend it to fan's of women's fiction, because Risa was such a strong character.

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### **Kathy Martin says**

The blurb calls this part murder mystery and part love story and that is true. It is also a frightening and

complex story about memory and lies. The story begins with a murder. Carol Slezak is brutally killed by being strangled and hacked with a machete. G.G. Trask, a mentally handicapped co-worker at The Ding Dong, is railroaded into a confession. At the same time Risa's alcoholic husband Sean disappears leaving her with their young child.

Eleven years pass...Risa is now married to Alan, a local politician, and living the life of a political wife. She isn't happy with her life or with the violence she is starting to see in her seventeen-year-old son Kevin. She has given up her dream of being an artist and is running her family's bar and restaurant The Kitchen which is the hotbed of gossip in their small town of Braden, Pennsylvania. Braden is a football town and Kevin, with Alan's encouragement, is a rising star on the football team.

Then Sean comes back to town convinced that he is really the one who killed Carol. He had been living on the streets in New York City but an accident with a subway train caused him to lose his memory for a while. Bits and pieces including the vision of Carol's blood stained body are coming back to him. His brain damage has also caused him to stop drinking though he is very dependent on some pills that he was given during rehab to keep him from drinking.

Alan is all for getting Sean out of town again. His presence is wrecking Alan's campaign for congressman. And he doesn't want to bring up that old murder case. Alan's only concern is his campaign and not doing anything to jeopardize it. He doesn't want to lose his wife to Sean either.

Then there is the young reporter Henry Saltz whose first task when he arrived in Braden was to get the report from Carol's crime scene. Henry is still around town eleven years later when Sean comes to see him to find out if the memories he is recovering are accurate. He is Risa's friend.

This was a compelling story with lots of twists and turns. There were lots of surprises along the way. No one was who they seemed. I recommend this one for those who like dark, complex mysteries. It was a very engaging and compelling read. I couldn't put it down until I found out the truth.

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## **Luanne Ollivier says**

I read and reviewed Doug Magee's debut novel Never Wave Goodbye last year. He's back with his newly released second novel Darkness All Around.?

Risa's husband Sean disappeared eleven years ago, leaving her to raise their son Kevin alone. Risa moved on, after having Sean declared dead, marrying Alan, a friend they both knew. Except.... Sean's not dead. He's returned to town, determined to turn himself in - for murder. Risa's best friend Carol was killed eleven years ago and Sean believes he did it...or did he?

Sean's memory is suspect - he suffers blackouts from alcohol abuse coupled with a brain injury. As Sean remembers bits and pieces, we slowly piece together what might have happened eleven years ago. But Magee is tricky, populating his novel with many possibilities, keeping us guessing until the end. Risa remembers the past as well and is torn between protecting her son and supporting her new husband but also remembering the love she once felt for Sean. Darkness All Around is a mystery but also explores of the emotions of the characters, adding another layer to the story.

A new genre heading perhaps - the thoughtful thriller

### **Charmaine Lim says**

This was awful. I'm going to bed

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### **Anne says**

Blech....a poor poor poor man's version of Harlan Coben (who is far from being a genius writer!) I just wanted to find out who done it, and in the end the cliched characters and stinky red herrings just made me sad I wasted time on this book.

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### **Caitlin says**

*Darkness All Around* is a thriller with a literary bent, although in all honesty it reads more like a family drama to me than a crime thriller. Yes, there's plenty of violence and twists and turns, but at the end of the day this is really the story of one woman's journey back to a life she thought she had truly lost and it is this story that kept me hooked.

The premise is pretty typical for crime fiction: There was a murder. The wrong man was sent to prison. The initial reporter on the scene of the crime becomes a raging alcoholic, disappears, and is declared dead. His wife remarries an up and coming politician and has a different life than she planned. Her son has a different father than she had planned for, as well, and this has consequences. How could it not? X number of years later the original husband has an accident causing him to get both treatment for his alcoholism and for the brain injury he suffers. In the process of his brain recovering from all of this trauma, it keeps bringing up memories. He returns home to find out what happens, the chickens come home to roost in various ways, and the whole thing is wrapped up in a neat package.

Magee rises above the formulaic by writing interesting characters, spinning a good yarn, and making you care about the outcome. Although I thought the ending was predictable, I enjoyed the book. It kept me entertained on a long day of travel from Door County, WI (by car) to the Milwaukee Airport and a flight to Las Vegas, another flight to Oakland, CA, and a taxi ride home to Berkeley. I did run out of book (I often do in these situations), but I had my Kindle so that wasn't a disaster. Long story short this was a good fun read on a long boring day.

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### **Mary Ann says**

If you can make it thru the first few chapters, the story is worth reading. Interesting story line which helped me finish the book. However I feel I must note that in my opinion the use of a particular four-letter word was overdone, and was distracting. This was my 1st free book from Goodreads & I appreciate the opportunity to read & review it.

## **Liz says**

This was a quick, fun read. A good story with a surprise twist ending i honestly did not see coming!

There was some awkward phrasing throughout and the female lead character was not very deep or well-developed so it was hard to root for her even though her situation was awful. She just sort of filled in a role. The politician husband was appropriately sleezy and well-written. Overall I enjoyed this book. I received it for free from Goodreads First Reads.

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