



Sodom Road Exit

Amber Dawn

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It's the summer of 1990 and Crystal Beach has lost its beloved, long-running amusement park, leaving the lakeside village a virtual ghost town. It is back to this fallen community that Starla Mia Martin must return to live with her overbearing mother after dropping out of university and racking up significant debt. But an economic downturn, mother-daughter drama, and Generation X disillusionment soon prove to be to be the least of Starla's troubles. A mysterious and salacious force begins to dog her; inexplicable sounds in the night and indescribable sights spotted in the periphery. Soon enough, Starla must confront the unresolved traumas that haunt Crystal Beach. *Sodom Road Exit* might read like a conventional paranormal thriller, except that Starla is far from a conventional protagonist. Where others might feel fear, Starla feels lust and queer desire. When others might run, Starla draws the horror nearer. And in turn, she draws a host of capricious characters toward her--all of them challenged to seek answers beyond their own temporal realities. *Sodom Road Exit*, the second novel by Lambda Literary Award winner Amber Dawn, is a book that's alive with both desire and dread.

Sodom Road Exit Details

Date : Published April 3rd 2018 by Arsenal Pulp Press

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Author : Amber Dawn

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From Reader Review Sodom Road Exit for online ebook

Kat Rogue says

Edit: Looking back, I'd be more likely to give this one a 4.5/5 because I did need some editing at parts that lagged on a bit too long.

Sodom Road Exit gets 5/5 from me because it absolutely nails the "moments". The big, heartfelt, emotional, hard, funny, fucked up moments. Pulling the rug out from under my heart as it falls out of my chest moments. This book triggered the shit outta me by so accurately depicting the ways abusive relationships can make you feel powerful, despite how much it feasts on your soul. How do you forgive, move on, forge healthier ways out of old relationships? How can you decide who is worth keeping and who needs to leave?

There were times the book felt like it dragged for me, or made heavy reference to places and people that folks who grew up near Crystal Beach would appreciate more than the average reader. But I just couldn't leave Starla. I had to know how she was doing, if she was going to be okay. I fell in love with the dummy. And the townspeople around her. And, well, hot lesbian sex.

Dawn earns every word. I've never finished a book while sobbing in the last pages and reaching the perfect climax of emotions right at the final sentence. That experience won't leave me anytime soon. I'm a kinky gay softy for trauma stories with supernatural elements, so SUE me.

Benjamin Appleby-Dean says

Messy, moving and irreverant, Sodom Road Exit chronicles the life of Starla, a college dropout and abuse survivor, in 1990s Ontario as she returns to her beachside home town to encounter an awkward reunion with her mother, a graveyard-shift job overseeing a campsite community of alcholics and thrill-seekers, and the restless spirit of a young woman from the ruins of the famous Crystal Beach amusement park.

What follows is equal parts ghost story and personal exorcism, where Starla's self-destructive habits dovetail with the mounting effects of her possession/affair with the unabashed Etta, who grants her the insight to build a new family of fellow outcasts even as she reduces Starla to a shell of her former self.

Despite the supernatural subject matter, this book feels incredibly grounded and in-the-moment, crafting a survival narrative that's so personal and compelling it almost feels painful to read. It brings its turn-of-the-decade setting to life without nostalgia or sentiment, conjuring a vivid picture of backtown Canada, and all this while being unapologetically, furiously queer.

Hannah says

i maybe can't name all the reasons this novel was wow but here are a few:

1. lesbian ghost possessing a lesbian
2. in fact sorta a fucked up all lesbian polyam vee situation
3. survivor-centred real-ass inclusion of adult relationships & dating after csa
4. meet-cute doing a private duo in a strip club

5. sex worker lesbian who is shown to readers through the eyes of someone who thinks she's badass & gorgeous & incredible, who doesn't have to have a whole SWERF-y Drama about her potential/gf being a stripper
6. portrayal of magic & culture of white family that is ethnically specific (italian) & entirely women-centred
7. constant beautiful exploration of creating family (chosen & blood) which as u all know is my fave queer jam

not to mention amber dawn's very particular queer femme idiom & metaphor. this is a thickkkk book & i felt fuckin spoiled to get to spend this long in the world & with the characters she created.

bonus shoutout to laughing sal's lil cameo appearance; i grew up visiting her every summer at the musée mécanique near the ruins of my ancient great-grandpa's baths in sam francisco.

Audrey says

Much like Sub Rosa was written for sex workers, this novel was written for survivors. The story and characters are going to stay with me forever.

Grady says

'Some claim to see her right away, others denounce her as a trick of light and shadow'

Canadian author Amber Dawn is a filmmaker, and performance artist, and of course poet and author – her novel SUB ROSA was winner of the Lambda Award and the memoir HOW POETRY SAVED MY LIFE won the Vancouver Book Award. She is editor of 'Fist of the Spider Woman: Tales of Fear and Queer Desire', and co-editor of 'With a Rough Tongue: Femmes Write Porn.' Amber earned her MFA in Creative Writing (UBC), and she was the 2012 winner of the Writers' Trust of Canada Dayne Ogilvie Prize for LGBT writers. Amber teaches creative writing at Douglas College and the University of British Columbia, is the co-director of the Vancouver Queer Film Festival and finds time to serve as a volunteer mentor at several community-driven art and healing spaces.

Amber Dawn is a present age Rumpelstiltskin – making gold out of straw – though for her the straw is 'words' and the product is one of the most engrossing LGBT stories yet spun. Enmeshing paranormal concepts in the text of coming of age may seem strange to many – but then think back to those strange years when we were all trying to make sense of a world that was nebulous at best and ever-changing at worst.

Amber's synopsis best describes the beauty of this adventure into the known unknown – 'It's the summer of 1990 and Crystal Beach has lost its beloved, long-running amusement park, leaving the lakeside village a virtual ghost town. It is back to this fallen community Starla Mia Martin must return to live with her overbearing mother after dropping out of university and racking up significant debt. But an economic downturn, mother-daughter drama, and Generation X disillusionment soon prove to be to be the least of Starla's troubles. A mysterious and salacious force begins to dog Starla; inexplicable sounds in the night and unimaginable sites spotted in the periphery. Soon enough, Starla must confront the unresolved traumas that haunt Crystal Beach.

Starla is far from a conventional protagonist. Where others might feel fear, Starla feels lust and queer desire. When others might run, Starla draws the horror nearer. And in turn, she draws a host of capricious characters toward her—all of them challenged to seek answers beyond their own temporal realities.'

Yes, the story is creative but Amber's sensitivity and eloquent prose buffers a sheen on this fine novel that assures it will become yet another award winner. Highly recommended.

Sassafras Lowrey says

admittedly i hate stories about mothers and daughters loving each other even in complicated hurt ways, so in that regard this book wasn't my cup of tea BUT this novel is wonderful, and smart and haunting in the best ways. after all who doesn't love the romance of old amusement parks and add to that a lesbian ghost story?! yes please!

Ahmad Ramadan says

An amazing style of writing, great storytelling, and a mixture of so many narratives and genres, I adore the complexity of queer characters and the depth of understanding there. Amber Dawn never disappoints.

Amy Roebuck says

I give this five for the second half of the book--a really neat ghost story, with lots of local references. I give it two for the slow moving first half of the book... and for the (for me) unnecessarily graphic sex scenes (and no, it doesn't matter if they're lesbian or hetero--they weren't necessary for me to understand the power both Etta and Tamara held over our protagonist). This makes it a 3.

Maddie (HedgehogBookReviews) says

You can also find this review on Hedgehog Book Reviews!

Starla is disappointed that she has to move back in with her mom after dropping out of college. Originally from the small town of Crystal Beach, she's been living in the city of Toronto while slowly falling more and more into debt. Upon coming back home, she begins working as the night shift manager of a campground and RV park, The Point. One would imagine that this job might entail some pickup around the grounds and a little downtime, but Starla's experience is much more extraordinary. From the very first day, strange things start happening at The Point. The ghost of a girl who died in Crystal Beach takes special interest in Starla and begins communicating with her inside her head. As Starla becomes closer to the residents of the campground, the ghost's pull on her gets tighter. The strangely sexual bond that the two have may end up hurting Starla in a way that her new friends can't understand or see.

I'm so excited that Arsenal Pulp Press agreed to send me an ARC of this title. Ever since I discovered they were releasing a lesbian, ghost novel, I've wanted to get my hands on it. I've read a few lesbian mystery-ish books that ended up being too predictable or too much like fan fiction, but Sodom Road Exit is not like those at all.

Starla is queer and mentally ill and her struggles are very realistically written. I think the way that Amber

Dawn portrays her symptoms of PTSD and general suicidal ideation is accurate, which is a great feat because these illnesses can be hard to describe. I especially liked learning about Starla's way of coping with triggers and stressors—spelling out words to calm herself down and distract her brain. This is a real technique taught in therapy and seeing it in literature was pretty cool. I found the way that Amber Dawn imagined that a ghost would affect someone with these illnesses interesting as well. PTSD and irregular moods can be difficult to manage on their own; putting sexual chemistry with a ghost on top of them certainly wouldn't help!

One of my favorite things about Sodom Road Exit is the ending (and not because I'm glad it's over). It is neither too happy nor too unsatisfying. The ability to wrap things in a way that's believable and concluding is one that I admire in authors. I really appreciated the character evolution that Starla and her friends at The Point went through. It's weird that a supernatural/lesbian mystery made me feel so good after finishing it, but I guess that's Amber Dawn's special talent.

Lastly, I want to comment on how Sodom Road Exit dealt with one of its character's wavering sobriety. Hal, someone residing at The Point, struggles with alcoholism. Starla notices that Hal's drinking is interfering with him properly treating his wife and son, so she works to get him set up with a twelve step program. The way that AA is discussed in this book is really positive and educational. Sometimes addiction and alcoholism are displayed in such a negative light in works of fiction, which is not helpful for reducing the stigma around the disease. Amber Dawn did an excellent job writing about alcoholism in a respectful way.

Overall, I loved Sodom Road Exit. As someone who enjoys reading books with supernatural elements and books with queer characters, I knew I was going to like this book from the very beginning. It definitely met and exceeded my expectations. I want to give a big 'thank you' to Arsenal Pulp Press for sending me this title in exchange for an honest review. I know I'm going to be thinking about Starla's story for a while. I'm excited to read more Arsenal Pulp Press books in the future!

CaseyTheCanadianLesbrarian says

Very cool blend of family drama, queer person returning to small hometown, and a good old fashioned haunting, all while making interesting changes to your usual expectations of those stories. Full review on my blog [here!](#)

M. says

I love this book! Best described as "lesbian supernatural thriller," which is probably all the info you need. But here's my blurb: "A fun park ghost story that tilts from horror to desire and back again, Sodom Road Exit is both the roller coaster and the scream -- a long, death-defying scream that roars through pain and betrayal, forgiveness and new life. Amber Dawn's Star will break your heart, if apparitional Etta doesn't beat her to it; and the impact of their shivery, sensual touch across time will ripple fresh into the future. With ferocious compassion and an unforgettable cast of characters, Amber Dawn has written an extraordinary novel of queer love and survival. Consent to be possessed by it."

Julene says

In Sodom Road Exit, author Amber Dawn writes speculative fiction that is a ghost story. The main character,

Sterla or Star, is a young gay woman who moves back home to her mother's house because she is in debt and needs a place to live for free. They have a difficult relationship, partially due to early sexual abuse from one of her mother's former boyfriends. Her mother is a controlling woman with no boundaries. The dialogue between them is real and there is a full range of emotional development for the mother.

The setting is the town Crystal Beach, it's in Canada near Lake Erie, Niagara Falls is close as is the NY town of Buffalo. Starla finds a job at a trailer park near where a former amusement park used to be with a famous roller coaster. We are set on edge moment-to-moment as it is an all night job with a male character who watches her from behind trailer blinds and a phone she consistently finds hanging off the hook. She stays in a cabin where a young man killed himself, he was the son of the woman who hired Star, she owns the trailer park. Sterla reads his journals and learns he too could see the ghost. He kept careful records of how to build things, and how he planned to kill himself without ever saying the word suicide.

The ghost, Etta, haunts the park and gradually invades Star to get her help to rebuild the park. We meet a rich group of characters and are drawn easily into the drama that unfolds as Star does Etta's bidding and the gazebo is rebuilt from wood of a sunken ship. Star portrays Etta as an "Angel," who becomes a kind of prophet or fortune teller. The Angel at first appears to help people, but everything starts to spiral out of control. This is a gripping novel with compelling characters.

In an early hot scene she meets Tamara in a strip club and they engage in some women on women action for clients with cash. Star thinks it is anonymous, and gradually remembers the woman from her school days, at the end Tamara calls out her name. They and the ghost are interwoven as Star's body is being torn in the possession. Eventually there is a huge intervention by the community living at the trailer park. And promises are made to right a wrong and give the ghost peace. I suggest you read this thrilling novel. It is much richer than I can portray in these few notes. And if you've not read Amber Dawn's Sub Rosa, or her poetry, I suggest you read that as well.

Taz S says

Gay girls. Ghosts. Small-town. 90s. Sexy. Trauma. Community building. The best media representation of someone like my mother I've ever read. I could not put it down! I'm glad it was not a short book so I could keep reading! <3

Many content/trigger warnings just to be aware of.

Kate Phillips says

I wasn't sure what to expect from the first few chapters of Sodom Road Exit. Now, it's a tough read - trigger warnings all over this book would be appropriate, and the first chapters had me worried that I was just not in the right headspace for this type of adventure. However, the characters felt real (specifically, the dialogue really sold it for me) and the plot felt promising (and queer) enough that it kept me in the game.

Especially near the beginning, the chapters occasionally feel like a series of rapid short stories - an encounter here, an encounter there, building to a point but rather separate; this makes for some slow moments where I was a little skeptical. That being said, Dawn does not treat her readers like they're stupid - it's crisp writing that needs attention, and rewards with nice parallels between the main plot and the protagonists other struggles, especially as the book comes to a close. The occasional narrative-swapping could be reminiscent

of Fried Green Tomatoes, but ghostly. It works alright.

As for the characters, we have a small but interesting crew to work with. The protagonist, Star, was a love-hate relationship. Her decisions and character developed over the course of the book, and her narration is what shows this best, and as an artist I loved her references. Occasionally we have a background character that enters and exits and has no weight on the plot, but the rest are emotional and generally well-rounded. My only complaint may be that everyone seems to take the supernatural goings-on in stride; personally I would imagine less suspension of disbelief in real life, but I'm not reading this book for classic "skeptic-turned-believer" arcs, so it works. I'm rooting for the cast, and their motivations make sense.

All in all, it was a good read that ended too soon - I would've taken a bit more of the adventurous beginnings throughout the entire story. If you're looking for a queer story (and you're prepared/in the headspace for some DARK territory), then this will do you just fine.

Michelle says

Yeah, this was extremely great. All the people should read this.
