



Harm None

M.R. Sellars

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MURDEROUS SATAN WORSHIPPING WITCHES

When a young woman is ritualistically murdered in her Saint Louis apartment with the primary clue being a pentacle scrawled in her own blood, police are quick to dismiss it as a cult killing. Not one for taking things at face value, city homicide detective Ben Storm calls on his long time friend, Rowan Gant-- a modern day practicing Witch-- for help.

In helping his friend, Rowan discovers that the victim is one of his former pupils. Even worse, the clues that he helps to uncover show that this murder is only a prelude to even more ritualistic bloodletting for dark purposes.

As the body count starts to rise, Rowan is suddenly thrust into an investigation where not only must he help stop a sadistic serial killer, but also must fight the prejudices and suspicions of those his is working with-- including his best friend.

About the Author: Born February 20, 1962, M. R. Sellars has studied many different religions and belief systems, both mainstream and obscure. To this day Sellars remains an avid student of the religious diversity which surrounds us, and often gives group lectures on request in order to help dispel the many myths and misconceptions that surround the practice of WitchCraft.

An avid member of The Nature Conservancy and the World Wildlife Fund, Sellars resides in St. Louis with Kathy, his wife of twelve years, and their daughter Willow Ann. Locally, their home is known to be a haven for neglected and abused animals, and the ever changing population stands for the moment at one dog and eight cats. Currently, Sellars is collaborating on a cookbook, as well as researching the third novel in the Rowan Gant Investigation Series.

M. R. Sellars is the recipient of the Linda White Literary Excellence and Silver Quill Awards for the short stories upon which Harm None, the first Rowan Gant Mystery novel is based.

Harm None Details

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From Reader Review Harm None for online ebook

graveyardgremlin says

Since I don't feel like writing a review, I'll just detail what I liked and disliked about the book.

Liked:

The subject matter - From what I know, I think the author handled Wicca/Witchcraft very well.

How it was written - I'm not the grammar police and don't know everything about it, so it was fine with me.

Sometimes I think that the books that have the best grammar are the most unrealistic and holds the reader away from the book and story because of this. I mean Mr. Sellars has a point, how many people really speak or think in proper English?

Most of the book.

Disliked:

The constant use of paleface, squaw, and other white or Native American Indian terms. I get that Rowan and Ben are friends and they use the words as buddies (and the author means well I assume), but I think it's unlikely that anyone would say them so much - it felt forced and unrealistic to me.

Some repetitions of phrases, descriptions, etc. - i.e. Felicity's hair, eyes, temperament, other actions people did, or descriptions of places.

The use of the word query. How many people actually use that word? LoL

The ending was a bit saccharine and not very likely, but I'll let that pass.

Neutral

Some of the descriptions made me a bit queasy but I think it added to the storyline.

Overall, I was very impressed with the story, will read the next and be on the lookout for others in the series.

OpenBookSociety.com says

HARM NONE (ROWAN GANT MYSTERIES, BOOK #1) BY M.R. SELLARS: BOOK REVIEW

M.R. Sellars

Harm None

Rowan Gant Mysteries, Book #1

Review brought to you by OBS staff member Heidi

This is the first book in the Rowan Gant Mysteries series that introduces us to, not surprisingly, Rowan Gant. Rowan is a witch, not a hocus pocus turning you into a frog kind of witch but a practicing Wiccan.

The story starts out when Rowan's best friend, Ben, who's a homicide detective, asks him to help decipher some Pagan symbols that were found at a murder scene, drawn with the victim's blood. The killer is using

Wicca but is not a true Wiccan because the main mantra of their religion is to harm none, which is where the title of the book hails from. Rowan tells Ben what he wants to know and quickly starts offering to help him try to solve the case. Ben, needing all the help he can get gladly accepts.

It all becomes a little more personal to Rowan once he gets a gander at the crime scene photos and sees that the victim is one of his former Wiccan students, Ariel. After a little more investigating, he realizes that the killer isn't done and this was just a practice run.

Then, more bodies start piling up, all apparently practice runs. Rowan uses his extra sense to find clues and is even able to see what happened at some of the murder scenes through the energies that are left there by the victims. But he is disturbed by nightmares all starring Ariel and a little girl version of Ariel asking him why and pleading for him to make it stop.

Once, the puzzle pieces start fitting together Rowan realizes that the last and final victim is going to be a child; they must quickly figure out who the murderer is and race against the clock to save an innocent girl before she is sacrificed in a horrendous ritual, created by a sick individual.

Being from the St. Louis area I thought it was different and kind of neat reading a book based in St. Louis and reading and seeing places near me that I've actually been to, such as Union Station, mentioned in passing.

This book did take me longer than I expected to really get into though. I really don't know why that is because the storyline was interesting from its onset. Maybe it was because it was all about the murders in the beginning and I was missing the characters' day to day lives?? I seemed to get more into it when Rowan's wife ended up in the emergency room and when Ben and his wife were fighting. Then, after that the story started picking up with them figuring out all the little clues leading up to who the killer is.

I ended up really liking this story and would definitely read more of the series.

Read more here:

<http://openbooksociety.com/article/m-...>

Jeri says

Ugh ... talk about purple prose... not as many romance readers use to describe silly descriptions of sex, but purple as in "overly descriptive". It reminds me of a MASH episode where Radar is taking a writing class through the mail and tries to practice in his daily reports, throwing in adjectives heavily and indiscriminately (anyone remember that one?).

Some examples:

"Blue-white wisps curled upward from the lit end of tight roll of tobacco that was hooked under my index finger. I took a lazy puff and rolled the spicy smoke around on my tongue before blowing it outward into an evenly spreading cloud that wafted around on the warm breeze."

(He was smoking a cigar, in other words.)

"After eight years with this auburn-haired, second generation Irish-American dynamo on a five-foot-four frame ..."

(Gee, does this sound like a natural speech and/or thought pattern or what?) (What.)

"Ever since his promotion, we're lucky to see him at all,' she expressed." (She WHAT?)

You know, it's pretty unusual for me to analyze or even specifically notice the writing style, because I start a novel in the mind frame of wanting to sink into it, not analyze it, but the quality of writing I found here made it impossible for me NOT to notice.

Awallens says

As I read more and more mystery series, or rather, started many mystery series, the more I get addicted to them. There are series I want to gobble in one bite, however, and this one is one of those series. Rowan Gant and his wife Felicity are practicing Wiccans, and when a young woman whom Rowan taught is found murdered with a Pentacle in blood on the wall, Rowan's friend Ben Storm who is a detective asks him to investigate and help interpret the many Wiccan symbols left behind at the murder. I loved this book not only for the mystery which is riveting and interesting but also because it's refreshing to see Wicca in such a positive manner, much as the religion is. Props to M.R. Sellars for doing such a stellar representation of "The Craft". Now to find the next book or two...

Michele bookloverforever says

Wicca, perversion, cops, murder, psychic abilities....

Keith Chawgo says

A True Master at Work

M R Sellars is one of the gifted writers of paranormal psychological thrillers that encompasses a truth and strength that is seldom found in this genre.

Writing strong 3 D characters against a kaleidoscope of depth, emotions and true artistry has created a highly in depth palette to a world that is normal but yet new. His crafty narrative urges the reader forward into the unknown and providing details in covenant and rituals without talking down to his audience.

I am not a fan of first person narrative because often the story is let down with an unsatisfactory lead

character that brags or emits their thoughts and added unwanted conclusions that tend to overshadow the story. Sellars does not do this, in fact, he is such a polished writer that every thought, meaning and nuance is used to lift the pages to. A new level.

The crime sequences and investigations are extremely well handled without being dragged down with over technical talk to show that the writer is copying from a forensic text book which is definitely an added bonus.

Every character from the main players down to a fleeting character are so well articulated that it fulfils the reader into a familiar sense of everyone.

This is a truly fantastic read enriched by a master of his genre. I can not think of one fault within its pages and would highly recommend this to any reader who is looking for a deeply satisfying read. Sellars is a master of his craft who deserves to be noticed. Excellent. A real treat.

Lise Quinn says

This is a great book and the first of a really good series. I have read through all of them and I want more! Rowan Gant is the main character, a computer database consultant and a practicing witch. When a crazy preacher starts killing witches, Rowan's friend down at the police department asks him to consult on the case. This is the end of life as Rowan and his wife, Felicity know it and the beginning of a whirlwind of murder, graphic torture, and a pagan point of view.

(I myself have been involved in the pagan community for nearly all my life - 35 years or more, the pagan viewpoint is generalized enough to be somewhat correct).

The characters are strong, they have depth. The storyline is fast paced and full of little details, but no so much to slow it down.

The series becomes intensely spectacular, with twists and turns and really unexpected surprises.

Sarah Goodwin says

Couldn't finish this due to the poor writing. Also the quite racist way the main character talks to his Native American friend (greeting him as Tonto and saying 'How' for example - even if they are friends in the book, that's no way for the author to portray white/Native American relationships when I'm assuming he himself is NOT Native American and therefore cannot redefine those references as non-racist).

Also the main character refers to the Summer Solstice as a lesser sabbat - there ARE no lesser sabbats - only esbats - and says that someone was flayed with an athame, which is a traditionally BLUNT witches dagger used for directing energy. A boline is the knife used for actually cutting things, e.g. herbs. So, it reads like the author knows nothing about contemporary wicca.

Returned ebook for a refund.

?Misericordia? ~ The Serendipity Aegis ~ ?????? ✨♥️ says

This is engrossing, it almost traps you in the story and wouldn't let you out until long after it is over.

I'm going to stick with this series for awhile.

The language of the book is not your average everyday language we all hear all the time. And it is a good thing, makes a nice break from other paranormal stories.

More review to follow!

Q:

Of course, with any marriage—well, good ones anyway—there is a generous amount of compromise. The “compromise” that had been reached in ours was something on the order of a matter-of-fact statement from my headstrong wife of, “If you’re going to smoke those things anyway, you’re going to do it outside! (c)

Q:

He had been seeking information about the meaning of a religious symbol known as a Pentacle. Though I knew he was perfectly aware of my religious practices, I was mildly amazed he had equated me with the emblem. (c)

Q:

“Bein’ a copper is a menial job... It’s kinda like bein’ the secretary for all the chaos out there in the world...But anyway...” (c)

Q:

Once you’re a Witch, you usually stay a Witch. (c)

Q:

I had once attempted to explain to him that Wicca and WitchCraft, or simply “The Craft” as we often call it, involved no pointed hats, bubbling cauldrons, or flying brooms. To the knowledge of any practitioner of the religion, it never did truly include such things. I told him that Wicca was simply an Earth religion, and as for deities, ours were the Earth and the Moon: Diana and Pan, respectively. There was no evil intent, and in fact, our most basic and all-important covenant was to “Harm None.” We viewed our religion as a way of life through which we did our best to live in harmony with nature, and through study and meditation, we attempted to learn control over the natural energies that inherently reside within all of us. I further explained that in doing this, we sometimes developed abilities that some would consider psychic in nature, such as an uncanny sixth sense or the ability to heal others and ourselves: We think of these as learned talents, nothing more, and nothing less. I even added that I knew of no incident where anyone had been turned into a frog, except in fairy tales. The simple fact was that even if that were possible, no self-respecting Witch would consider it.

Even after I had answered his several pointed questions, he still clung to his misconceptions, and so, out of respect for him, I made sure to steer clear of the subject entirely. (c)

Q:

“Would ya’ mind tellin’ me the difference on that again?”

“No problem. A Pentacle is basically just what you said, a five-pointed star surrounded by a circle. It’s a very common symbol in the Wiccan religion. When it’s upright,” I scribed the symbol in the air with my finger, “with only one point at the top, it represents man and the spirit as it rules over the four elements. That’s when it’s called a Pentacle. If on the other hand you turn it one hundred-eighty degrees, and two of the points are at the top,” I spun my finger in a circle, “it’s called a Pentagram and represents the spirit’s union with material elements.” I relaxed back into my chair. “Some however, place an improper, albeit widely accepted, meaning on the Pentagram. They claim it represents Satan, evil, black magick, etcetera.” “So, if it’s right side up or whatever, it doesn’t mean anything evil?” he posed.

“It actually depends on who drew it, and the significance THEY placed on it, but it’s really nothing more than a symbol. Inherently, neither of them mean anything evil,” I answered. “In my religion anyway.” (c)

Ok, this reads like an ABC on Wicca but still quite soothing.

Q:

“Sometimes you’ll find a different color at each of the four corners,” I answered. “Yellow in the upper left, blue in the upper right, red in the lower right, and green in the lower left. They represent the elements of Air,

Water, Fire, and Earth. On occasion the top point will be white, representing Akasha, or the spirit.” (?)

Q:

“Wicca and WitchCraft get compared to everything under the sun. Good, bad, and otherwise. I just like to keep up with what I’m being accused of.” (?)

Q:

“A grimoire,” I told him. “Kind of like a recipe book for Witches.” (c)

Q:

Lorelei says

I was very excited to find this series as I'm a Pagan as is the author. But I'm afraid the excitement ends there. I persevered with this book simply because I really wanted it to be good. Unfortunately the writing is far too Wiccan preachy and teachy. The author wastes no opportunity to sell the 'good news' about Wicca. It reminded me of way too many conversations with overly earnest born-again-Wiccans. And earnest it is!

There is no edge to this book, which seems to be trying to be a forensic crime novel with Wiccan jiggery-pockery rolled in and a splash of proselytism for spice. Rather than creating a recent alternate universe scenario that is common to the urban fantasy genre the author has chosen to set the work in the 'real' world so it becomes quite jarring when his Wiccan protagonist starts experiencing extreme magical experiences (I can't bring myself to use the pretentious 'k'). Dresden works because of the consistent philosophy that any act of faith has power regardless of the religious affiliation. This seems to be implying that only Wiccans/Pagans has the key to this magic thingy.

If he's going for crime novel then he needs to pick up the pace and get some help with terminology - there is no 'pre-mortem' it's 'antemortem' when it happens before death.

And I always cringe when the dreaded 'symbology' word is blandished about. It's not a word, really. The word for the science and study of symbols is semiotics and the study of the meaning of symbols is symbolism - it's such a Wiccan jargon thing to do.

In terms of character, um, yes. I really find it hard to visualise the lead guy. He is so even emotionally - as are most of the characters, it's almost as though they all have Asperger's syndrome. No one has a sense of humour, no one has any issues to work through, they have no character arc and no personal development. All the descriptive detail (ridiculous reams of it) is saved for redundant scene setup - he really could do with a sharp editor. The book really is twice as long as it need be.

Really one for the Wiccans, and not really many more.

Emily says

I had to create a genre name for this book to adequately define the experience of reading it, as this book is the first of its kind that I've come across. Harm None perfectly marries the paranormal (in the sense that the bad guy in this case believes himself to have powers and abilities that surpass that which we can observe

with our senses) and police procedural novels, yielding a story that was intriguing, exciting and educational all at the same time. It's urban fantasy but more grounded, still fantastical but without the fantasy element. Rowan does with his faith and religious practices what other characters do with their genetic mutations or supernatural powers.

Rowan Gant is a practicing Witch, along with his wife, Felicity. He knows full well the kind of prejudice and yellow journalism that inevitably comes into play whenever the words "cult" and "Satanic" and "ritual murder" get thrown around or mentioned in the paper, and he wants to protect his religion and his community from that kind of scandal. In truth, WitchCraft is about a connection with nature and the surrounding world, about center and balance; Rowan knows that none of those messages will ever see the light of day if people think that all Witches are the same or that all rituals or practices are conducted for the same reason.

When Rowan has a chance to work with Detective Ben Storm, a homicide detective who also happens to be his best friend, to sort out the religiously based details of a horrific crime from the distractors, he jumps at the chance, due to his strong belief in using his powers for the good of the world. He doesn't anticipate that the case will be as bloody or as personally resonant as it is, but once Rowan starts an investigation, he's determined to see it through to the end.

The case quickly becomes complex, and the killer shows no signs of stopping as more murders take place. Rowan has to combat skepticism and outright animosity from less enthusiastic members of the police department while he deals with the increasingly more vivid visuals of the murders. The killer is practicing his skills on each successive victim, and the skills get more horrific as we go along.

My favorite part of the book was the unique and different personality that each character possessed. Even as Rowan and his wife, Felicity, have to deal with a deeply personal tragedy, we see each person in the story receiving and processing the news in their own way. Every character has a unique voice, and even when familiar story elements are used to move the plot along, the characters' individuality is never sacrificed, which is refreshing.

This is a great introduction to what promises to be a highly entertaining series. I'm glad I got the chance to get started from the beginning.

JK says

There were some interesting ideas and the actual story was decent, but it ultimately failed because the writing was atrocious.

So, the good...

I enjoyed reading an urban fantasy book that didn't dwell on the monsters (supernatural monsters that is) and the fact that it isn't clear as to whether those monsters even exist in this world. The main baddy was trying to summon something with his final killing, but it was never stated if it was possible to do so. There's definitely supernatural/magical stuff happening in the book, so you do know that it's possible for monsters to exist. The only problem with the magic was that the main character, Rowan, constantly talked about how there wasn't

really magic with Wicca. The magic was just considered harnessing natural energies and manipulating it, but that's kind of the same thing to me.

And the bad...

The problem I had with the story itself was that it was a bit repetitive. There'd be a murder and the guys would get stuck and then Rowan would have a nightmare about it and some clue would be revealed that would bring them to another murder or revelation... only to have them stuck again. Then Rowan would have another nightmare. And they'd move forward and get stuck. Then Rowan... you get the idea. It was very repetitive in that aspect.

Next you have the characters themselves; I don't think Sellars quite knew who he wanted his characters to be. I never had a real sense of who they were or why they did what they were doing because it always seemed to change. The way the characters spoke was constantly changing as well leaving me wondering who they really were. Like with Ben Storm (detective in the novel, one of the main characters), half the time he'd talk normally, but then at times he would just break out with things like, "y'all" and "whad'ya mean" or anything else similar to that when he'd normally just say "you all" or "what do you mean." It was so random when it happened that I'm not sure which was meant to be how he talked. Then there was Rowan himself - uhg. His method of talking and describing things was all over the place. Sometimes he'd talk like the protagonists of today's novels, but then other times he'd talk like a quaker. It made no sense nor did him calling Ben (his best friend) "my friend" all the time. Sellars would write something like, "I gave my friend the run down of what happened" or "my friend sipped his beverage while watching the dogs." Why would you call your best friend that and not by his/her name? It made no sense. Rowan, and his wife, were also made out to be very peaceful, sympathetic people who care a lot for their surroundings and other people - to the point where they defend someone that has a lot of evidence pointing to their guilt. Now this same couple has a miscarriage and it's just glanced over. They just don't care about it like they should - like any normal couple would. Rowan even asks his wife, "so how are you doing with the whole miscarriage thing." Who the hell would ask a question like that? It was just so at odds with the characters up that point that I almost stopped reading there. This leads me to the writing...

I don't write well, it should be apparent by now in this review, but this book was just terrible. It wasn't even the grammar, it was just the style and word choice. Whenever someone asked a question it would be the question and then "I queried," "he queried," "she queried," or "my friend queried." Who does that? Who actually uses the word query that often to describe someone asking a question? It got annoying very, VERY fast. Then there were parts where a character described an action like, "I waited for my friend to tell me what was wrong for I didn't want to push him." The book is littered with sentences like that, sentences that just don't read well and aren't believable language. That was another thing that had me almost dropping this book midway. It was so bad I ended up just skimming the last third - which didn't even have me feeling lost or like I was missing anything. If you do end up reading the book you'll find those two things and numerous other examples of terrible writing. Hah, another thing I just thought of - Rowan's description of the internet. He was doing research and kept referring to it as the World Wide Web and then he'd say, "I'm going to search on the 'web' for this information." Sellars also went so far as to explain how searching for something on the internet went. Rowan was only on the computer doing research one time in the book and thank goodness for it - he worked on computers, but talked like an old person when referring to the internet.

The descriptions were pretty redundant as well. Simple actions like dogs playing were so over detailed it was just... for lack of better term, stupid. Characters were described over and over again like you'd forget what

they looked like or what their demeanor was if you weren't reminded.

Overall the book was just a chore to get through because of poor writing and character/story development. It had an interesting premise and did illuminate the Wiccan religion a bit, but it just wasn't enough in the end to warrant reading the next in the series.

Anna says

loved it, good mystery, great characters

Bad Tim says

it's an interesting story by an annoying writer. locales in the city of st louis were specific and accurate, but all of the st louis county locales were fictionalized; and i hate his obsession with avoiding 'said' or 'asked'. people don't use the word 'query', and especially not as much as sellars does. it detracts from the otherwise stilted dialog.

Kitty says

In the introduction to the book, Sellars states that since this book is in the first person view and since nobody is grammatically correct in the way they think, he had a lot of spelling errors and grammatical errors intentionally placed in the book. Personally, I think that's a load of crap and his editors should have fought against him on this point. The book has an interesting story line but the author just isn't a good writer. There was way too much dialog and a lot of scenes were described in such detail that really wasn't needed. All of this distracted me away from the story line. I might take a chance and try his second book, praying that his experience will help him be a better writer, because he did have a good idea. Would I recommend this book? Nope. There are a lot of books out there that are just so much better.
