

Book Review: In the Woods They Wait
By Carrie Lee South

Thanks to NetGalley and Kathleen Quinlan at Little Brown & Company for this advance reader's copy, in exchange for an honest review. "In the Woods They Wait" is scheduled for release on September 22, 2026.

At the outset it felt like this was a missing person's story written in dual timelines. And it was ... until it also became a bit of a sci-fi/horror story.

That's okay. But the shifting of gears made for a slightly uncomfortable ride.

Fifteen years ago, Audrey Figg's little brother, Benny, disappeared while hiking during a family vacation to Devil's Den state park in the Ozarks. Audrey blames herself – which is technically accurate because she attempted to hide from him during the hike – and the guilt (which she hasn't shared with anyone) haunts her to this day.

Fast-forward and Audrey is now a park ranger in the same park. And when a little girl named Ivy goes missing, all the bad memories (which never left) bubble to the surface. Audrey, as you would imagine, becomes obsessed with finding Ivy.

The dual timelines work well as they illustrate what Audrey and her family experienced fifteen years ago in the aftermath of Benny's disappearance. They also provide depth to Audrey's character so it's easier to understand her motivations.

The story moves slowly, however, which can be frustrating at times. And when it does pick up, it does so at a frenetic pace. That can be jarring; kind of all or nothing. And once the pace quickens, it's not hard to forecast where the story is going (because parts of it seem familiar from other novels) and how it will end. So, no surprises.

But the narrative is well written. Several sequences of hikers moving through narrow tunnels within caves are likely to unnerve readers who are claustrophobic. And the descriptions

of Devil's Den state park (a real location in Arkansas) are vivid and help bring some of the slower-moving sections to life.

"In the Woods They Wait" is not an edge-of-your-seat horror story, nor is it a keep-them-guessing missing person's story. But it is well written and entertaining. Just be prepared for the slower pace through the first three-quarters before it shifts quickly into high gear.

Three stars for a book that doesn't quite qualify as a page-turner but will still hold your interest throughout.