



## Department Zero

*Paul Crilley*

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## **Department Zero** Paul Crilley

THE END OF THE UNIVERSE IS ONLY A HOP, SKIP, AND SLIGHT STUMBLE-THROUGH-A-WORMHOLE AWAY

Harry Priest just wants to make sure his ex-wife doesn't take away his visitation rights, and his dead-end job cleaning up crime scenes for the past ten years isn't doing him any favors.

But when Harry attends what he thinks is a routine death, he stumbles onto a secret multiverse of alternate realities all reachable through universe-hopping gates. Policing these worlds is Havelock Graves, the Interstitial Crime Department's top agent for ten years running (according to him). When Harry accidentally messes with the ICD crime scene, Graves and his team are demoted as low as they can go: Department Zero. They're recruiting Harry too—not because he charmed them, but because he just might hold the key to saving the universe...and getting their old jobs back.

To do this, Graves and his team set out to solve the crime that lost them their jobs. A crime that involves a cult planning to hunt down and steal the fabled Spear of Destiny in order to free the Great Old One Cthulhu from his endless sleep in the Dreamlands. (Because that's another thing Harry soon finds out. Everything H. P. Lovecraft wrote is true. Like, everything.)

The team will have to fight its way through realities filled with Martian technology and evade mad priests (Harry's favorite kind) in a realm of floating landmasses where magic really exists.

And Harry has to do it all in time to say good night to his daughter.

## **Department Zero Details**

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Author : Paul Crilley

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## From Reader Review Department Zero for online ebook

### Sadie Forsythe says

DNF page 70

This is probably just a matter of taste. I found the 70 pages I read too ridiculous to enjoy, thought there was too much dialogue and exposition, and the whole thing was just too close to a Men in Black rip off for me. Maybe it improves if I were to give it more than 70 pages. But already I was dreading picking the book back up and I wasn't even a 1/4 done. Best to just back off now.

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### Dave says

I loved this book. It is sort of a variation on the first Men in Black movie, but instead of aliens, the menace to be policed are lovecraftian monsters, old ones, and elder gods. great characters and dialog - fun plot. highly recommended.

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### Alger says

A book that delivers on its premise. Neither is this a high brow fantasy novel, nor a carefully plotted concept-driven sci-fi tome. This book falls neatly into the gonzo spoof novel genre of the 1970s and 80s. The genre being spoofed is the subset of novels that take place in a secretive but banal bureaucracy running parallel to the humdrum everyday: think Hogwarts and the Ministry of Magic in the Harry Potter world, or Multinational United in the film *District 9*. The obvious inspiration for *Department Zero*'s satire are the quasi-legal institutions of *Men in Black*, only Crilley throws a solid dose of Cthulu into the mix. Wry and self aware (there is an extended riff between characters as to whether a previous scene qualifies as *dues-ex-machina*), the writing is brisk and clear, with a strong visual element that shows Crilley's past in writing screenplays.

Where there are problems with the book, they tend to be where the story has a tendency to veer too far into bromance, over-borrowing tropes from Buddy Cops films (two loners who are used to doing things their own way, grudging respect, in-jokes). One predictable result of bromance is that the female characters are prone to vanish, and that is a shame because this book is loaded with interesting women. Take for example, Ash, who is a long time high level operative in Havelock's team. She gets to spend most of the novel in the office waiting to hear from the boys. Then there is Priest's ex-wife and daughter, whose essential purpose in this novel is to give Harry a reason to save the universe. Teshani, who is a bad ass bodyguard, a woman strong enough to survive a cave in and the attack of a dozen hell hounds? She just heads off back home. Anderson, the young woman who is the only member of the PTOU who actually wants to save the multiverse, she disappears into the melee never to be heard from again. Now granted, men aren't allowed to get in the way of this bromance either and the women characters are **much** more three dimensional and human than the usual run of genre bimbos, but still the heroic stuff, the stuff that saves the world? That's all man time (\*fistbump\*).

Otherwise, this is a fine fiction-lite novel, a book you can read through in hours and put down feeling satisfied.

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## Jennifer says

The set up for Crilley's *Department Zero* is undeniably killer: crime scene clean-up specialist and failed law enforcement agent Harry Priest gets called out to a scene that's even less right than normal and finds himself suddenly in the middle of a multi-dimensional battle for the artifacts necessary to wake long-dreaming Cthulhu from his watery sleep in R'lyeh. Because all that indescribable horror H.P. Lovecraft wrote? Actually true. And the only people who can stop world-wide gibbering madness are Harry and his new friends at the Interstitial Crime Department, the multiverse's FBI-cum-Keystone Cops.

Clearly, what got me here was the tantalizing *everything H.P. Lovecraft wrote is true*. (Including, if you're watching the news, the rampant racism and xenophobia. But I digress.) Unfortunately, rather than weird fiction, Crilley delivers something that may just barely qualify as odd, and that only if you squint and hope really hard. Sure, there are some trappings - Nyarlathotep! Cthulhu! The Dreamlands! The hounds of Tindalos! (which, by the way, technically Derleth, though HPL mentioned them later...so are we saying everything in the Mythos is true? Not just HPL proper? Sorry, nerd moment.) - but the plot is straight-vanilla action thriller, with fight set piece after fight set piece, most of which (four - I counted) end up with the protagonist getting knocked out and waking up tied/strapped/chained to a chair/table/pillar. I mean, for fuck's sake, the climax involves *face-punching Shub-Niggurath*. Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn, and isn't paying enough attention to kill us all with a cosmic eye-rolling.

Though Crilley's characters remain flat and far less witty than he seems to think they are, *Department Zero* works fairly well as a knock-off supernatural thriller, careening from plot point to plot with determination and verve. If the author relies too heavily on deus ex machina, he at least winkingly acknowledges it, and any readers who haven't actually read their way through the entire collected works of Lovecraft and attended NecronomiCon twice (read: those of you with lives) will probably find it a pleasing enough distraction. For the devotee of HPL, however, it may well drive you near to madness at the missed opportunity, which is perhaps the most Lovecraftian thing that can be said of it.

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## Dark Faerie Tales says

Review courtesy of Dark Faerie Tales

Quick & Dirty: A world in which Lovecraft written work is all true.

Opening Sentence: The polite term for what I do for a living is "biohazard remediation."

Excerpt: No

The Review:

Harry Priest is a crime scene cleaner, and one night he receives a phone call from a contact within the LAPD, so he and Jorge (the boss's son) head out to the crime scene to clean it up. However, when they get there

they quickly realize that something is different. Harry is sure that the police haven't even been on the scene so he backs off, but before he can even call the police to confirm he finds Jorge in the room filming the crime scene.

Once he gets Jorge out of the room, two officers show up and say they are with the ICD which Harry has not ever heard off, but they kick them out of the scene, and when Harry calls his contact he confirms that the scene was taken over by the ICD. So they leave and Harry dwells on it until Jorge calls him in a panic and he rushes over to Jorge's apartment. Only to find some giant spider eating his brains. Completely freaked out Harry takes off and is pursued by a Shakespeare quoting monkey.

He accidentally shoots Graves (one of the ICD officer's) and soon is offered a job within the ICD where he finds they are on the hunt for the Spear of Destiny and fallen gods. Harry finds himself kidnapped more than once, and begins to wonder if he will even get out of this alive. But discovering that this is really a multi-verse already puts a lot on Harry's plate, will he be able to stop those trying to free an old god?

This is an interesting book and a quick read. Harry is a little more bumbling than I like my MC's but I adored his relationship with his daughter. I thought it was really neat that in some worlds the War of the World really happened (H.G. Wells book) and that Lovecraft's stories are all true. At the same time it was creepy and a little weird not going to lie, I tried not to freak out when that spider thing was on Jorge. I couldn't decide if it was interesting when the man-faced monkey spoke only Shakespeare quotes, but what I did get and really loved was the author clearly loved to read and this book is a homage to some great horror and science fiction classics.

All in all, this was decent book. I am not sure if it was meant to be a standalone or the start of something. Even though most of it wrapped in the book. I kind of felt that it was the start of something. Sometimes though we have to be satisfied with what we get.

Notable Scene:

I jerk back, trying to fight down panic. What do I do? Jump out the window, probably breaking my leg in the process, or run past the weird spider-monster in the lounge. Nothing in life has prepared me for this situation.

FTC Advisory: Pyr provided me with a copy of Department Zero. No goody bags, sponsorships, "material connections," or bribes were exchanged for my review.

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### Tammy says

**The nitty-gritty:** A clever, inter-dimensional homage to Lovecraft & Co., with lots of action, snark and humor.

*So here's the thing. When I set off after the guy who stole the spear, I really didn't expect to end the night chained to an altar in the ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral while my blood is sucked from my body by a group of insane (and unfit) cultists frantically working foot pumps in an attempt to bring the rotting corpse of a Martian invader back to life.*  
*But them's the breaks, honey.*

In my ongoing quest to find Lovecraft-inspired fiction, I knew the moment I saw the cover for **Department Zero** that I had found a worthy contender for this popular subgenre. I mean, just look at it! Big, scary Cthulhu monster—check. Dark and storm-ridden sky—check. And those might not be tentacles (they look more like roots), but tentacly-looking things—check! There's also something about the cover that told me this story would be full of humor, and boy was it. I had a blast reading this book, and even though the action and world-building were a little *too* much at times, I recommend this for any readers looking for a fast-paced horror novel laced with snark and sarcasm at every turn.

The story is told from the perspective of main character Harry Priest, a down-on-his-luck divorced guy who works for a company called L.A. Cleaners cleaning up crime scenes. And while it's not the most glamorous of jobs, it's a steady paycheck. But one day, Harry and his partner Jorge get called to a scene that is beyond anything they've seen before. And maybe that should have been a warning to Harry, because after that, his life gets a whole lot more complicated. Jorge steals something from the crime scene, something that belongs to some very scary and powerful people. Before he knows it, Harry is recruited into the Interstitial Crime Department, a secret organization that solves cosmic crimes in other dimensions.

Harry reluctantly joins Department Zero, the lowest department in the ICD (literally, it's miles underground!) and finds himself working with a rather unpleasant man named Havelock Graves. Because of Jorge's theft of the mysterious object, Graves and his co-workers have been demoted to Department Zero. But Graves has a plan to get their old jobs back. An interdimensional plot is afoot to steal two rare objects that have the power to awaken the Elder Gods—including, you guessed it, Cthulhu—who if awakened, have the ability to destroy not only our world, but every dimension that exists in the multiverse. If Graves and Priest can find the objects first, there's a chance they *could* save the world.

One of my favorite things about **Department Zero** is Crilley's world-building. If you're a fan of the Cthulhu mythos, then you'll have a great time with this book. Crilley sets up a universe where Lovecraft and other authors like L. Sprague de Camp were writing about *real* monsters but disguising their writings as fiction. As Priest and Graves begin their quest to save the world, they have access to many different realities and dimensions, and part of the fun of this story was following them as they discover a multitude of wondrous worlds. At the center of all these worlds is a place called Wonderland, the hub through which any dimension can be entered. Much of the story takes place in these dream-like dimensions, but Crilley also grounds his story by allowing Priest and Graves to solve part of the mystery in our world. My favorite speculative stories are ones that have one foot firmly planted in real life, and I thoroughly enjoyed the scenes where the characters visit iconic Los Angeles points of interest. One of my favorite scenes takes place at the Griffith Observatory, a place I've been many times myself.

The other thing that stood out for me was the relationship between Priest and Graves. Graves' immediate dislike of Harry Priest makes for some very funny dialog, and they spend most of the story trading insults. For the most part, these sections really worked for me, although there were times when the humor was a little *too* over-the-top. But their relationship reminded me of some of the best "buddy films" out there, like *Lethal Weapon* and *48 Hours*. If you love the "good cop, bad cop" dynamic, then you'll love hanging out with Priest and Graves.

Crilley gives Priest a more personal side in the form of his ex-wife Megan and young daughter Susan, and one of the running plot lines is that Harry calls Susan every night to read to her over the phone. Even in the midst of running through multiple dimensions, Harry always tries to find time to call her, even when he's in a different dimension and his cell service is spotty. He also feels remorse over his ex-wife Megan, who seems to be trying to keep him away from his daughter. This attempt to make Harry more sympathetic worked fairly well, but I would have liked to see that subplot more developed. This was a perfect opportunity to add

some depth to the story, but Megan and Susan come off as two-dimensional and there really isn't much character development.

As for the action, although it was thrilling and made for a very quick read, at times it felt *too* non-stop for me, as there are very few moments when the characters actually stop to take a breath. I loved the idea of many different dimensions, but sometimes the characters are simply running through one dimension to get to another, and we don't really get the chance to appreciate the wonderfully creative aspects of the worlds that Crilley has created.

But those are just minor criticisms, because I had so much fun reading *Department Zero*. If you love the mythology of Cthulhu and the Elder Gods, or even if you're like me and just want to learn more about that world, this book will scratch that itch. Humor and horror are an irresistible blend when done right, and Crilley has nailed it.

**Big thanks to the publisher for supplying a review copy.** Above quote was taken from an uncorrected proof and may differ in the final version of the book.

**\*\*Good news! I'm hosting a giveaway of *Department Zero* on January 30th (U.S./Canada only) so don't forget to stop by and enter the giveaway and read an excerpt of the book as well!** This review originally appeared on Books, Bones & Buffy

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### **Vincent Mainetti says**

I received this book from a giveaway here, and so it deserves the respect of an honest review. First to the author and publisher I would like to say thank you for giving me the opportunity to be an advanced reader for "Department Zero."

Fast paced, and action packed would be the best way to describe this book in short. In more depth I would have to say that although this is meant to be a fast paced, there were a few places where slowing down for an extra page or two could have really helped. The characters are funny and comical in a sense that the everyday real life humor is between peers. This book was easy to read, by this I mean to say that the vocabulary chosen in writing this book seemed accurate to what I felt the target demographic is. Assuming that the demographic is between high school and early college. There were a few spots in the first half of the book where I had to stop, go back a few pages and, read it over again. This was due to the randomness of the early story, though that is an integral part of the book, now that I look back on it as a whole. "Department Zero" is full of laughs, face palms, comedic cliches, and even sentimental moments that have made so many other novels worth reading. This was a wonderful light and hilarious read.

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### **Lynn Williams says**

3.5 of 5 stars

Incredibly entertaining and fast moving. Full review to follow

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### **Lisa Michalski says**

A hilarious thrill ride from start to finish. If you like a healthy dose of sarcasm with your near-death experiences, then this one is for you. If you loved R.I.P.D. (the movie, I can't speak for the comics) this is definitely your cup of tea, but if you despised every moment of it then completely ignore my last statement :)

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### **Enrique Arroyo says**

Could make a real good movie! Thanks to my friend for recommending it!

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### **Mogsy (MMOGC) says**

3.5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum [https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/01/12/...](https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/01/12/)

I had a nice surprise when I picked up Department Zero. The book initially caught my eye as a cross-genre science fiction and fantasy adventure about infinite alternate realities, as well as a secret society of agents who have to traverse multiple worlds to clean up interstitial messes. But as if that isn't cool enough already, Paul Crilley doubles down by tying everything into the Cthulhu mythos and giving this one a nice shot of Lovecraftian horror.

The story stars Harry Priest, a man with one hell of a tough job. He's in what you would call "biohazard remediation", which means he cleans up dead people for a living, usually at the site of accidents, murders, suicides, and unattended deaths where the body has had plenty of time to decompose in the stifling L.A. heat. You name it, Harry's seen it. But still, nothing could have prepared him for his latest assignment. On what he thought was another routine call, Harry arrives to a gore-splattered abandoned motel room in the middle of nowhere, and sees something he shouldn't have. Before long, Harry finds himself the target of savage spiders and monkey creatures and other frightening monstrosities that shouldn't exist.

The attacks soon lead him to meet up with Havelock Graves of the Interstitial Crime Department, an agency that polices the multiverse. After being recruited into the ICD, Harry learns all about the network of interdimensional gates and their access to an infinite number of worlds in which there's always someone, somewhere, sometime trying to break the rules of universe-hopping. Unfortunately for Harry though, Graves is determined to get back on top after his team is disgraced—and isn't above using our protagonist as bait to draw out a Cthulhu cult that has dastardly plans to destroy the multiverse by awakening the Great Old One.

The first time I read Paul Crilley was a few years ago when I picked up his novels in the Tweed and Nightingale Adventures series, though at the time I hadn't known he predominantly wrote Middle Grade and Young Adult titles. I was excited when I learned that he was branching into adult speculative fiction with the recent Poison City, and now Department Zero. As expected this one was a blast, combining a mix of action, adventure, and just plain weirdness. It's also extremely fast-paced, the pages flying by as we're shunted from one oddball situation to the next. In many ways, the plot reminded me of some crazy video game, which isn't too surprising considering Crilley's biography includes writing credits on five computer games (one of them being Star Wars: The Old Republic, a favorite of mine). Keep in mind too that Department Zero is a multiverse story where literally anything can happen, and indeed the author also makes the most out of this by unleashing his imagination, allowing this parade of horrors and wonders to move at full speed.

That said, at times this hectic approach feels overwhelming. The plot will continue charging on ahead even when you wish it would take a breather for a couple pages, regroup and recuperate and maybe spend a few moments getting to know our characters better. Many of them have zany personalities but then they end up being largely forgettable, and Harry himself feels roughly sketched and underdeveloped for a protagonist. He has a failed marriage, a dead-end job, a young daughter that he wishes he can spend more time with, as well as a bucketful of regrets—but I couldn't connect emotionally to any of his problems. A part of me thinks this might have something to do with the writing style. First-person present tense can feel a bit awkward even at the best of times, and I don't know if it was the best narrative choice for this story. There's also the tone of the humor, which sometimes feels over-the-top and a bit forced, though at the same time Crilley also serves up some epic snark, leading to memorable dialogue and hilarious one-liners.

At the end of the day, Department Zero is a light and entertaining novel guaranteed to shake you out of your typical urban fantasy routine. While it might not be that deep, and the humor and pacing might take some getting used to, the story's quirky premise is perhaps the foremost reason I would recommend it. Readers who enjoy a mix of genres and concepts will especially get a kick out of this snappy, imaginative adventure. If you happen to like your UF on the eccentric side, then this book will be like treating yourself to the most amazing all-you-can-eat buffet.

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## Fantasy Literature says

### **3.5 stars from Marion, read the full review at FANTASY LITERATURE**

*Disclaimer: just so you know, some of the books we review are received free from publishers*

Department Zero by Paul Crilley is a neat mashup of humor and horror, of interdimensional fantasy and Lovecraft. First person narrator Harry Priest has a lively voice and a lot to learn when his life gets turned upside down after one really bad day at work. If you like acerbic British humor and the Old Ones of H.P. Lovecraft, this is a book for you.

Priest is a crime-scene cleaner in Los Angeles. He is separated from his wife and daughter, and bitter about it. Priest hates everything about his life and takes no responsibility for anything that has gone wrong in it. Then he and the boss's son go to a scene of carnage at a motel. Soon Priest is encountering wizened, Shakespeare-spouting monkeys, fleeing from monsters made of spiders, and fighting off people wearing strange bone masks, people who definitely aren't from around here. Eventually, he is conscripted into the Interstitial Crime Division, specifically the Disposal Department for Interstitial Crime Scenes — just don't call them "Dicks." And right after that he and his new partners uncover a multi-world plot to awaken sleeping Cthuhlu....**3.5 stars from Marion, read the full review at FANTASY LITERATURE**

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## Cory says

Men in Black meets HP Lovecraft meets the Nazi Third Reich. I have been wanting to dive into Department Zero for a super long time after months of seeing positive reviews and recommendations from the local book store.

A story of an inter-universe police force stopping crimes between 'rips' is my cup of tea. The story universe, premise, world making, and plot are all incredible in this novel. Time and time again I found myself pausing to visualize what I was reading and imagining the world's created in the words before me.

The reason this story is not 5 stars is there is a real struggle with dialogue and characterization. Detective Havelock Graves and protagonist, Harry Priest are all over the place. From arguing with villains millions of years old over the proper use of the word groovy, to describing Priest as being incredibly unmotivated and completely out of shape and under-qualified to then immediately have him (with no training) fight off multiple demonic creatures single handedly; the characters are at times very tough to follow. There is not much personal growth with the very few exceptions of when Priest stops to think of why he got divorced.

Numerous occasions I literally rolled my eyes and sighed at dialogue. The biggest eye roll came to head at the Dana encounter (readers will understand).

Another issue is at times I feel Paul Crilley struggled to tie together plot points. Almost every other chapter Priest would be hit in the back of the head to become unconscious, or injected to become unconscious only to wake up to a plot point resolved with no explanation was quite noticeable.

Few faults aside, this was a very fun read. I felt it was a unique cross of a sci-fi noir with Brooklyn Nine Nine. I very much respect the new approach to a long established genre.

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### **Anne says**

So, I don't like spiders. Therefore, I didn't make it very far into this book. End of story.

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### **Viva says**

This book was OK but I didn't really like it. The front part of the book was very good. I found the writing easy to read and get into. But it took too long to get into the meat of the book. I found everything long and drawn out. A lot of filler could have been cut out. However, the book is already short at 305 pages so it would have been more 1-200 pages if it had been converted into a fast paced book.

Another problem is the humor. A good humorous book is very hard to write. Most of the time, it falls flat and it looks like a book that tries to be funny. This book didn't need the humor attempt. It could have done well enough with it.

So overall, long and drawn out, humor fell flat. I got this book free as a review copy.

Edit: OK, I just read the other reviews that found this book humorous. Let me provide an example of this humor:

"You think I'm going to live my life in a bunker surrounded by weirdoes [sic] and losers?"

"Nice way to talk about your co-workers."

"You haven't seen them yet..... You know the ones. They piss off the wrong people. Don't know when to shut up."

"Kinda like yourself then."

"No, idiot....."

The above passes off as humor or light hearted banter. You be the judge.

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