

Book Review: All the Colors of the Dark
By Chris Whitaker

Bigger (or in this case, longer) is not necessarily better. Put another way, if you can say what you need to say in 300 words, why take 600?

That pretty much sums up my feelings about Chris Whitaker's newest novel, "All the Colors of the Dark." It's not poorly written. There's just too much written, period.

The setting is the small town of Monta Clare, Missouri in 1975. Young girls are disappearing. When the daughter of a wealthy family is targeted, Patch (Joseph Macauley), a local teen born with one eye, saves the girl. He is injured in the process, and his body disappears. Saint (female), Patch's closest friend, leads the search to find and rescue him – and she does.

But the kidnapper gets away.

More importantly, during the weeks Patch was held captive in a pitch-black basement, along with another apparently imprisoned teen (Grace) who he cannot see due to the darkness (which is unrealistic point number one, because eyes do adjust over time), he develops a dependency on Grace, and a vision of her in his mind's eye.

When Patch is rescued and the residence where he was held burned to the ground, where's Grace?

This eventually leads to a long (and I do mean long), cross-country search by Patch to find Grace – alive or dead. He becomes obsessed with learning what happened to her, visiting the families of missing girls to see if their daughter might be his Grace.

Prior to his journey, however, Patch develops a passion for painting. But not just any painting. He paints what he imagines Grace looks like, then eventually paints portraits of all the missing girls whose families he has encountered. The paintings will, down the road, play an important part in the story.

But “down the road” is the key point. After a fairly active first few chapters, the book moves along at a snail’s pace while Patch moves systematically from state to state to find Grace. And over the course of these pages, nothing really happens. Patch travels to a town, talks to the missing girl’s parents, and moves on.

Oh, and he robs a few banks along the way, pocketing a small amount of spending money, and donating the bulk to missing person’s charities. And doesn’t get caught ... at least for quite some time.

By the time the pace finally picks back up, perhaps over the last 50 pages or so, the feeling (on my part, at least) was more about finally finishing this long-winded story rather than the anticipation of how it will end. Had the story been encapsulated in about 200 or so fewer pages, I might feel differently.

The only blessing is that there are 261 chapters, meaning, the great majority of them are really short. Some as short as one page. So, if you choose to read the book, at least you won’t find yourself stuck in the middle of a 20-page chapter with no way out. *Don’t you just hate when that happens?*

I finished the book, so it wasn’t that horrible. But I can’t muster up more than 2.5 out of 5 stars for “All the Colors of the Dark.” For me, there was just too much gray.