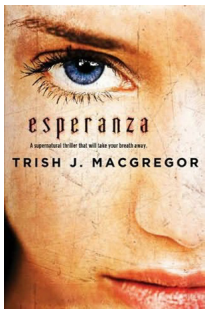
ESPERANZA (Tor), by Trish J. MacGregor (pictured), is an effective romantic thriller about two ill-fated lovers lost in time. They must find each other in order to save a helpless town from losing a full-scale war against an invasion of ghosts.

Tess Livingston is traveling to Ecuador to escape her tumultuous life as an FBI agent. After experiencing a harrowing near-death experience, she hopes her bumpy bus trip to Esperanza will give her much necessary clarity and relaxation. On the same bus is Ian Ritter, a journalist who has just gone through a bitter divorce. Their chance meeting sparks an immediate attraction—though neither of them realize they share an intimate connection to the supernatural.



Their relationship draws the malevolent attention of Dominica, a powerful phantom who achingly hungers for life. Her demonic spirit inhabits the bodies of random and unwilling participants and takes over her victim’s body completely, from their brains to their limbs. While in possession, Dominica lives out a fully physical life, until she feels she has no more use of the body. Yet for some strange reason, Dominica cannot possess either Tess or Ian; an unknown force constantly protects them from her. This situation only intrigues Dominica more, as she suspects the travelers of being a serious threat. The locals of Esperanza come to the rescue of the foreigners, hoping they hold the key to stopping Dominica’s reign of terror.

The romance between Ian and Tess evolves into an action-packed thriller, then dives straight into the realm of time travel as the couple are unexpectedly flung back into the past. Ian is transported to 1968, but retains memories of the present; he ends up in a mental institution after telling his wife he has fallen in love with another woman 40 years in the future. While locked away in a padded cell, Ian has to find a way to escape and set events into motion to save his soul mate.

Tess, unfortunately, finds herself back in 2008, awakening from a coma in a hospital bed. She struggles to reach Ian, as they are supposed to meet somehow in the present to prevent a massacre: The ghost world has been growing in numbers, and Esperanza’s natives are facing an army of vengeful ghosts intent on wreaking havoc on their beloved home. Innocent lives will be lost if Tess and Ian cannot make it back to the present.

MacGregor builds a believable world in ESPERANZA, full of mythology and mysticism, and creates a sense of palpable danger with swift and nail-biting action. Anyone expecting a scary ghost story, though, will be disappointed. The storyline is geared more toward readers seeking a love affair about two destined souls fighting against time itself to stay together. In the end, ESPERANZA is more romantic escapism shot through with the supernatural than a pure horror tale.

{jcomments on}