



# Reader's Guide — *The Curse of Dead Horse Canyon: Cheyenne Spirits*

## Book 1 — Thematic Exploration

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### ✦ 1. Loss, Grief, and Resilience

- Sara's life shatters when Bryan is killed in a wreck she gradually learns was no accident.
  - As she peels back layers of deception, she must navigate grief, anger, and the need for closure.
  - **Discussion Prompts:**
    - How does Sara's process of grieving evolve throughout the story?
    - What moments best illustrate her resilience?
    - Have you ever faced a loss that demanded you uncover painful truths?
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### 🌀 2. Ancestral Calling and Spiritual Identity

- Charlie realizes he must return to the teachings of his medicine man grandfather to solve the mystery and avenge his white brother's death.
  - He reconnects with his Navajo and Cheyenne heritages through visions, ceremonies, and ancestral symbols like the sweat lodge, sacred red pipe, the heliacal rise of Orion's Belt (*Atse Ets' ozi*) and meaning of Canopus, known to him as the Coyote Star.
  - His spiritual journey runs parallel to Sara's quest for answers.
  - **Discussion Prompts:**
    - What does Charlie's relationship with his ancestors teach us about cultural survival?
    - What feelings surface to haunt Charlie as he returns to his indigenous roots?
    - How does building a sweat lodge and turning to the stars and celestial events for answers shape his understanding of himself?
    - Do you think spirituality provides clarity or complicates his decisions?
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### 🔪 3. Hidden Truths and Moral Courage

- From seeking to destroy evidence to the attack on Bryan’s vehicle, the story shows how power hides behind layers of bureaucracy and intimidation.
  - Sara and Charlie’s investigation uncovers the dashcam’s SD card and finally the USB drive with documented proof of the scandalous facility.
  - **Discussion Prompts:**
    - Would you risk exposure to reveal the truth in similar circumstances?
    - Why do you think Bryan left his clues encoded in star lore?
    - How does knowledge become both a burden and a gift in this novel?
    - Who or what is the actual antagonist in the story?
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### ⚖️ 4. Conflicts of Principle and Survival

- Charlie must choose whether to work for LSO—a choice that threatens his integrity but could secure his financial future.
  - Sara struggles with whether to go public with their discoveries or protect herself.
  - **Discussion Prompts:**
    - Which dilemmas resonated most with you?
    - Is there ever a clear right choice when survival and principles collide?
    - How do these conflicts reflect broader Indigenous experiences?
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### 🛡️ 5. Supernatural Intervention and Symbolic Protection

- Sara’s defiance during the mercenary attack, paired with Charlie’s ceremonial fast, suggest ancestral forces may be protecting them.
  - **Discussion Prompts:**
    - Do you read the commandos’ retreat as supernatural, psychological, or coincidence?
    - How does the concept of spiritual defense shape the story’s tone?
    - How do Indigenous beliefs regarding the supernatural differ from western cultures?
    - What does this reveal about how different cultures confront faith and fear?
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## ★ 6. The Stars as Witness and Guide

- The novel blends Navajo/Diné constellations with Western astronomy to create a celestial roadmap of hidden truths.
  - Canopus as the "pathfinder star" becomes the central symbol of Bryan's guidance beyond death.
  - **Discussion Prompts:**
    - Why is Canopus such a powerful motif?
    - What do the sky and stars symbolize about destiny and legacy?
    - Have you ever found meaning in celestial symbols or natural signs?
    - How does astrology facilitate understanding?
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## 🎵 Suggested Playlist

Music to accompany the novel's themes:

- Sarah McLachlan — *Angel, Building a Mystery*
  - Josh Groban — *You Raise Me Up*
  - Jonas Brothers — (Bryan's nostalgic favorites)
  - Vivaldi — *Four Seasons*
  - Buffy Sainte-Marie — *Starwalker*
  - Robbie Robertson — *Ghost Dance*
  - Nomad — (music evocative of journeys and hidden truths)
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## ★ Trivia & Insights

- **Canopus**, second in brightness only to Sirius, has guided navigators for centuries, fitting the theme of a path to buried truths.
- **The sweat lodge ceremony** encompasses authentic Cheyenne traditions for physical and spiritual renewal. The lodge's very shape is a reminder of returning to the womb. The ceremony employs the senses: sight; hearing (rattles, praying, singing); aromas (sweetgrass); touch (sage branch brushing of body), taste (water during breaks). All are now recognized as healing modalities that can open pathways to spiritual connection, enlightenment, and inspiration.
- **Dates, locations, and astrological symbolism** matched actual celestial events.
- The moment Sara confronts the mercenaries reflects the **Grandfather Spirits** intervening upon connecting with Charlie during his fast.