

A REVIEW OF RONALD MALFI'S "SNOW" **by Debbie Kuhn**

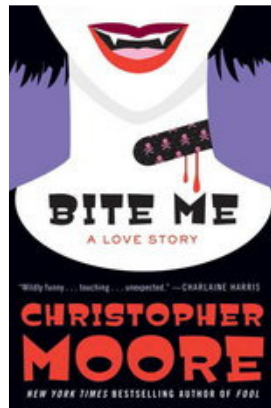
I found this book just in time to relieve my burnout on plots involving vampires, werewolves and zombies. Finally, something different to be afraid of.

"Snow" starts out with good characterization and then speeds up for the remaining chapters with one crisis and chase and explosion after another. The story starts with the newly divorced Todd Curry, who is dismayed when his flight out of Chicago is cancelled due to a snow storm. Todd was supposed to spend Christmas with his young son and he's determined to get there come hell or high water. He happens to befriend a sassy cutie named Kate, who ends up renting the last vehicle available. She offers Todd a ride and then the adventure really begins. Especially when they reach the countryside, where they pick up a stranded elderly couple and encounter a confused middle-aged man wandering along the road. The man claims his daughter is lost in the snow, and the group ends up in an isolated, deserted town.

Something strange has taken over the citizens – the ones left alive anyway. Malfi gets an A plus for creating a desperate, spooky atmosphere with elusive monsters who seem impossible to kill. Snow has smothered the town, which means the creatures can pop up anywhere and possess a person. Are they aliens? Evil Native American spirits? No real explanation for their origin is given, but that doesn't make them any less sinister

Despite the incredible circumstances, I found the characters' dialogue and actions believable (even the romantic subplot between Todd and Kate). All the loose ends aren't neatly tied up the end, which I found even more believable, although some readers might not like this.

If you want to spend a late stormy night with a real page turner, this novel is for you.



A REVIEW OF CHRISTOPHER MOORE'S "BITE ME" by Debbie Kuhn

"I have sniffed the bitter pink Sharpie of despair and mascara tears stripe my cheeks like a mouthful of chewed-up black Gummi bears has been loogied in my eyes." So states sixteen year old Abby Von Normal, the diary-keeping narrator of Chris Moore's off-beat vampire love tale. "Bite Me" is another follow up to "Bloodsucking Fiends" – the middle book being "You Suck." If you haven't read the first two, you would probably still enjoy this sequel, but I'd recommend you start at the beginning.

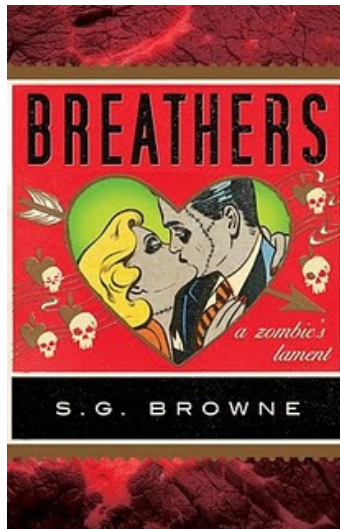
The eclectic mix of interesting main characters are all back for Book Three: Nineteen year old Tommy Flood (aspiring writer from Indiana, recently undead), Tommy's sexy redheaded girlfriend Jody (his sire), their minion and Goth Girl Friday, Abby (who would love to be undead), Abby's genius science nerd boyfriend Steve "Foo Dog" Wong ("manga-haired love monkey"), the Emperor of San Francisco (old homeless guy, backed up by his faithful dogs Lazarus and Bummer), The Animals, Tommy's turkey bowling work friends from Safeway, and two of Frisco's savviest cops, Cavuto and Rivera.

Delightful mayhem ensues once more from troubles bred in Book Two when Abby and Steve encased the young lovers, Tommy and Jody, in bronze so they wouldn't have to be separated. In the meantime, Chet the shaved vampire cat is mutating, getting bigger, smarter and thirstier every minute, and while he's at it he's turning the city's stray cat population into bloodsucking fiends as well. Suddenly, homeless people and prostitutes are really hard to find in the Bay City.

OMG! Tommy and Jody must be freed in order to help everyone hunt down and destroy Chet and his undead feline army, and luckily, Abby's gay Goth friend Jared accidentally accomplishes the task. The hunt is on and no one is safe. Complicating matters is the trio of ancient vampires (made by Jody's sire, The Master) who sail into town on a mysterious black ship, intent on cleaning up the mess made by their master in Book Two. WTF!

This book made me giggle – a lot. Luckily, the character of Abby Von Normal is an on and off again narrator, just in case you find teen drama queen slang annoying. But be warned, if you are easily offended and would prefer reading a PC book, this trilogy ain't for you. Every race, creed and religion in existence is made fun of with tremendous glee and skill.

Will Tommy and Jody work out their issues? Will Abby finally become a real creature of the night? Will "Foo Dog" find a cure for vampirism? Will Chet prevail? You'll have to read the tale to find out.



A REVIEW OF S.G. BROWNE'S "BREATHERS – A ZOMBIE'S LAMENT" by Debbie Kuhn

This novel was nominated recently for a Bram Stoker Award in the First Novel category. I can understand why. I don't normally read zombie fiction, but when I heard this was a dark comedy, I couldn't resist buying it. (The groovy book cover nabbed my attention right off.)

In this fictional world, zombies have walked the earth for over fifty years – possibly the result of a virus or some sort of industrial contamination – that is never made clear. No one knows what will happen to them once they pass away. Some people come back and some people don't. Andy is one of the unlucky ones, that is, he wakes up undead and ends up walking the streets in his funeral suit. His wife stays dead – having also been a victim of a terrible car crash that has left Andy with a crippled foot and no voice. To make matters worse, he is now considered a 'non-human' with no rights. His daughter is sent away to live with his in-laws – never knowing about his 'condition.'

Since he isn't allowed to have a job, Andy is stuck living in his parents' basement, watching TV all day and drinking the wine in his father's cellar. His dad is resentful and his mother is repulsed by him. Andy doesn't understand why he couldn't just stay dead. He finally gets some comfort from attending Undead Anonymous meetings, where he meets others who've suffered a similar fate. He communicates by using the whiteboard/chalk that hangs around his neck. Andy and the others in the group end up meeting a 'rogue zombie' named Ray, who introduces them to his homemade 'venison' jerky. Andy gets addicted to the stuff and then begins to notice that he feels different. His voice is coming back, the awful scars on his face are healing, and so is his foot. Andy gets inspired to fight for the rights of zombies – literally risking his neck, since any zombie who's seen in public can be carted off to the SPCA, sold to zoos, or donated to body farms.

Browne mixes black humor and brutality with insightful, touching moments. I found the ending satisfying, not as predictable as most zombie fiction tends to be. This novel was easy to zip through because of the witty, believable dialogue (first person point of view also really works here) and interesting characters.

"Breathers" was a delightful surprise and I highly recommend it.



A REVIEW OF ILONA ANDREWS' "MAGIC BITES" **by Debbie Kuhn**

"Magic Bites" is the first book (2007) in a dark urban fantasy series written by husband and wife team Ilona and Gordon Andrews. Cool, huh? This novel is different in other ways as well, which makes it all the more refreshing.

The world of mercenary Kate Daniels has been ripped apart by magic riffs, or waves. Atlanta has been devastated, its skyscrapers reduced to rubble. When magic rules, monsters appear, witches cast spells and technology refuses to function (like weapons, cars, etc.). When the magic waves die, always abruptly, paranormal messes are left behind – and that's where Kate comes in. She makes a living by cleaning up the magical fallout.

Things get much worse, and more personal, when Kate's guardian is murdered. Her quest for justice puts her in the middle of a power struggle between two Atlanta factions: The Necromancers (who control the vampires) and The Shapeshifters, led by Curran, The Beast Lord (a lion). Kate is a kickass heroine who refuses to back down from any challenge. Her life is full of those even when things go her way because she must hide her secret heritage, and true power, at all costs.

Be prepared for some gore, but it's called for: the villain in this book is one of most hideous, unusual characters I've had the 'pleasure' to encounter. Also, the vampires are not at all the sort of charismatic, attractive beings found in most books these days, and I found that interesting. Although immortal, they are merely grotesque puppets controlled by the Necromancers.

And there is a minor romantic subplot, but don't expect any sizzling sex scenes – or any love scenes at all. This story is dark; however, it's not devoid of humor. Kate uses wit and sarcasm to hide her doubts and fears, and there are plenty of strange creatures in this novel to keep her on her toes.

If you like the fictional worlds created by Patricia Briggs and Karen Marie Moning, I think you'll be pleased with "Magic Bites."