



Bleeding Hearts

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Editor's Choice:

off

BfK Rating:

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I'd thought about becoming a vampire?It might be cool?, muses 16-year-old Lucy, one of the main characters in this American high-school novel with a confusion of good vampires, bad vampires, vampire-hunters and ordinary humans. As it is the fourth in a series, it would be best to start with the first, **My Love Lies Bleeding** (reviewed in **BfK** 182, May 2010), in order to understand fully the underlying situation and the provenance of the various characters. It seems that a family of vampire 'royalty', the Drakes, lies at the heart of the series, dominating the mid-western community of Violet Hill like the Ewings of **Dallas**. And very alluring they are: Lucy admires the 'dark hair, the pale skin and the very fine muscles' of one of the Drake boys, and recognises his superior speed and strength. This enhanced physicality of the vampire is matched by a heightened sensibility: on becoming a vampire, one teenage girl is 'aware of so many other layers to the world'. Naturally enough, this embellished perception is sustained by drinking blood, kept in containers in the fridge and coming preferably 'from blood banks and willing donors'. Some, however, comes from 'blood-slaves', whose blood appears to have the effect of alcohol ('it was nice, like chocolate-covered strawberries').

On the lighter side, there is plenty of high-school rivalry, teenage sexuality, beach parties, kissing, talk of condoms and tearing around on motor bikes. The plot largely concerns attacks by feral vampires, the *Hel Blar*, apparently acting for another group frustrated at being excluded from a 'Black Moon' council of vampires. There is little sense of plot-development within the book itself, much of which is taken up with laid-back dialogue ('Okay, I'm so punching Constantine in the nose?') and action-scenes involving battles with the marauding *Hel-Blar*. The female characters in particular emerge strongly as the novel progresses, one being the daughter of 'hippy homesteaders' and another, a refugee from an alcoholic mother in a concrete jungle back east. There is some contextualisation, with frequent and knowing references to Romantic literature, popular culture and films: indeed, one character, a lover of classical literature, tells us that 'those trendy vampire books?just get on my nerves?'. Nevertheless, the genre in general and this series in particular clearly have their followers, and any assessment of the novel has to recognise its contribution to a larger phenomenon. It is, however, a book of the moment 'its very contemporaneity is likely to limit its shelf-life.

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