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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ FANTASY

César

Julian M. Coleman
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Julian M. Coleman's *César* is a supernatural tale in the same vein as Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* and *Lives of the Mayfair Witches* series. Both authors make forays into the vampire and witch (voodoo priestess) mythology and locate their stories in the Louisiana bayous. No doubt Coleman was greatly inspired by Rice, but he explores territory unique to the vampire genre and delves into the historical, albeit fictitious, paranormal world of African Americans in Louisiana.

His novel begins in 1939, when the Thrust sisters, Rachel and Angelina, are living in Virginia, having fled the Louisiana bayous with their family to escape their enemy, the Trinity clan. In its desperation to destroy the Thrust family, the Trinity clan summons a demon vampire called César. Thinking he is under their control, the Trinity family commands César to seduce Rachel and either "turn" or kill her. Instead, César bewitches Rachel's younger sister, Angelina, who falls madly in love with him. César attacks Angelina. She tries to free herself from him by jumping off a cliff into a river. Coleman writes, "she became unafraid. In her heart she hoped that God would forgive her…Angelina spun around quickly and leapt into the full, white, and forgiving moon before floating down in a graceful plunge into the frigid embrace of the river…the water filled her nostrils, and although she couldn't breathe, or see, she gladly drank in the fluid darkness." César then pulls her from the water and rapes her on the beach. Rachel arrives on the scene and forces César to feed his blood into Angelina to bring her back from the brink of death. Because Angelina has the power of a priestess, she becomes an unholy hybrid of vampire and priestess, alive in the holy fire of her female ancestors and filled with the prowess of the undead.

Like Rice's books, Coleman's novel is charged with eroticism. Where Rice's work sometimes contains homo-eroticism, *César* is strictly heterosexual. The sexual scenes are frequent and hardcore but not gratuitous. Coleman's writing is melodious, rhythmic, and lyrical. The descriptions are rich and, at times, a little over done with adverbs and repetitiveness. For example, on page twenty-two Coleman writes that, "Angelina was ready to pop out of her prison like a child's toy." He uses the same description on page fifty-one: "…Angelina, weary of being jostled in that uncomfortable wooden box was tempted to pop out like a child's toy." The author also has favorite words, such as "kernel," that he uses once too often. These tiny slips are not detrimental to Coleman's powerful narrative but the errors can be distracting. With further editing, *César* could join the ranks of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Stephen King's *Salem's Lot*, Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, and John Ajvide Lindqvist's *Let the Right One In*.
LEE GOODEN (October 11, 2011)

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