

Chemistry

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When Stella Blunt arrives at a new school, her abrasive and straight-shooting personality doesn't make her many new friends—with the exception of Howard "Howie" Mullins, a sweet, shy boy in her Chemistry class who also happens to be a zombie.

The book is described as a "feminist response to *Twilight*," which is reflected in many key details of the book: Stella Blunt is loud and large, rather than quiet and wispy, and when bloodthirsty zombies start showing up, Stella doesn't hide behind her undead crush, but instead joins the fray with gusto and a chainsaw. Echoes of *Twilight* can also be found in more subtle ways throughout the book, such as in Stella's reluctant move to a cloudy, Pacific Northwest locale, and in Howard's intense (but much less creepy) stare at Stella when he sees her in class. Even the final dance scene is reminiscent of *Twilight's* conclusion.

Chemistry is funny and irreverent, and it doesn't shy away from explicit language or gore. Given the humor and tone of the book, it occasionally reads less like a feminist response to *Twilight* and more like a parody of it—Stella is loud, abrasive, and eager to fight her own battles, but she comes with little nuance and sometimes seems like a caricature of a strong heroine. However, she's also entertaining, engaging, and even vulnerable. On the other hand, Howie is uncomfortably compliant with Stella, even stepping in front of a moving car to please her—possibly a comment on the extreme personalities of many characters in young-adult romances, but a choice that makes it difficult to like or respect Howie in the same way.

Chemistry is a fun, clever novel that provides a welcome contrast to the more traditional young-adult romances of the genre, even while drawing on their warmth and familiarity.

STEPHANIE BUCKLIN (March/April 2017)

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