

## Chuck: The Different Vampire

**Marla Paul-Merasty a.k.a. Miss Marla**

**Alan Margolis, Illustrator**

FriesenPress (Aug 1, 2012)

Softcover \$9.99 (17pp)

978-1-77067-501-8

Everyone who thinks vampires can't walk around in the sunlight will be surprised to meet Chuck, a red high-top wearing, self-aware do-gooder who happens to be a 642-year-old vampire stuck in an eleven-year-old's body.

In the first book of what promises to be a series, *Chuck: The Different Vampire* learns of a special power that he alone possesses. If he is kind towards others, he can venture out of his warehouse and interact with people in the light of day.

Educational Assistant Marla Paul-Merasty has crafted a sweet children's story that is as entertaining as it is educational. Chuck teaches children the importance of manners, accepting differences, and helping those in need. Paul-Merasty includes educational tools in the back of the book, including an explanation of cerebral palsy, which may help to demystify this crippling disease and encourage understanding and tolerance in young readers. The bright full-page illustrations by Alan Margolis complement the text and are a beautiful representation of inner-city life.

Unfortunately, the morals conveyed in the text feel a bit heavy-handed and often lack finesse. Rather than working the lessons and themes into a more intricate surrounding plot, the morals (mainly kindness towards others) serve as the only story line. It's also unclear why Paul-Merasty chose a vampire, even one as charming as Chuck, as the vehicle to steer her young readers toward living in a conscious and thoughtful way. One might assume that the ubiquity of vampires in popular culture has something to do with the choice.

Occasionally, basic questions are left unanswered. For example, if Chuck doesn't drink blood, what does he eat? What do his parents think of Chuck's kind attitude and aversion to blood? Readers may find themselves hoping for an answer to some of these questions and for a bit more refined storytelling in the volumes to come.

COLBY CEDAR SMITH (December 19, 2012)

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