

Corn on Macabre Or Reflections of a Reluctant Vampire

Martha Jones

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Go ahead, say the title out loud, and you'll get a sense of what this pun-filled romp through the newborn vampire's world has in store. *Corn on Macabre* pokes fun at the self-help and vampire fiction genres simultaneously in this illustrated volume.

Martha Jones sets up her parody like a pop-psychology text à la Dr. Phil, with chapters like "Identity" and "Relationships" filled with advice for all the stages of a vampire's life. Jones directly addresses the reader as though he or she is indeed a troubled vampire seeking a life coach, which makes every word farcical from the start. The laughter really starts, however, with the first illustration, in which Jones considers the question of whether there can be any truly vegetarian vampires. This is followed by hilarious advertisement spoofs, snarky headstone epitaphs, and even a vampires' food pyramid.

A series of comic strips feature a young female vampire with an unrequited passion for a doctor at the hospital where she works. Watching her pursue Dr. Gregory, some readers will be reminded of the *Doctor Who* character with a similar story and, incidentally, a name identical to the author's. Jones references pop culture throughout the book, with characters reading books like *Bad Moon* in place of the ubiquitous *New Moon* from Stephenie Meyer's bestselling *Twilight* series.

While the tone is campy, it is not lowbrow. Jones is obviously knowledgeable about vampire literature, citing the Bram Stoker legend and even earlier incarnations such as Lilith, hailed as the very first vampire. Jones's jokes reference Edgar Allen Poe, Sigmund Freud, and Vlad the Impaler, lending weight to a text that sometimes falls prey to the blandness it is mocking. Marriage advice, for example, includes passages like, "Keep surprising each other, keep trying new things together, keep taking an interest in what your love likes and dislikes, and take breaks from each other once in a while." It is hard to tell if the author is poking fun at self-help guides in these moments, or earnestly emulating them.

The layout of *Corn on Macabre* is a bit chaotic, with chapters beginning at unexpected places, like near the bottom of a page. This, along with the thin margins, gives the book a crowded feeling. On the other hand, it is a delight to happen upon the comic drawings at random intervals. Readers will want to look closely at each one, as there are often several layers of meaning. Jones seems to have a never-ending supply of apt puns that will make readers groan and grin in equal measure.

SHEILA M. TRASK (July 9, 2012)

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