

“KNUCKLE SUPPER” (Book Review)

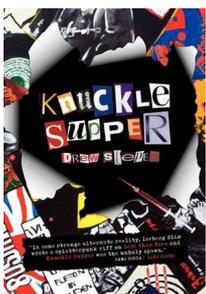
Written by Theresa Dillon

Saturday, 04 December 2010 11:18



Edward Cullen once told Bella Swan that she was his own personal brand of heroin. Well, there are no heroin-brand Bellas, let alone any sparkly vegetarian vampires, in **KNUCKLE SUPPER** (Alphar Publishing) by Drew Stepek (pictured). Instead, the reader gets real-heroin-addicted Los Angeles vampire gang members in the middle of a drug war and a young hooker down on her luck.

KNUCKLE SUPPER is an unforgiving, vicious and realistic horror story. Stepek explores chemical dependency, inner-city brutality, religion, molestation, abortion and the very nature of evil itself—the evil not necessarily being the undead.



R.J. is our antihero, a drug-loving member of The Knucklers, a vampire gang who are constantly feuding with other creatures of the night in LA. When R.J. stumbles across a bag of heroin and a 12-year-old prostitute named Bait, he takes them both under his wing. Think Travis Bickle and Iris from **TAXI DRIVER**. But soon things go way south for R.J. when Bait gets pregnant after being raped by some defiant bloodsuckers and a drug deal goes south. The Knucklers quickly end up with an unexpected windfall, and rival gangs (from Rastas to transvestite prostitutes to sweater-wearing preppies) start taking revenge and jockeying for pole position in the vampire-run LA drug trade.

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To make matters worse, pulling the strings behind these groups is a band of religious fanatics called The Cloth and a wannabe nun and psychopath nicknamed The Habit, who seems to know anything and everything. Ultimately, R.J. is forced to confront forces of evil even greater than himself.

KNUCKLE SUPPER is packed with sleazy characters doing very skeezy things, and while the gory details really amp up the action, the dialogue has a tendency to drag things down at times and the details lose their impact after a while.

Even though there are various types of exploitation involved in the lives/backgrounds of almost all the players in this blood fest, Stepek is masterful in enabling the reader to actually feel sorrow and empathy for a few of the characters (not only R.J. and Bait) and to see the human in the monsters and the monster in the humans. And the drug addiction, sadistic violence and heavy-duty sex abuse with which the book is packed isn't just fiction—a point driven home by Stepek's commitment to donate up to 10 percent of the revenue from KNUCKLE SUPPER to Children of the Night, a nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting youths between the ages of 11-17 who have been forced into prostitution.

This novel is definitely not for children, or the faint of heart, for that matter. But that's the way Stepek wants it. It's a deep exploration into the lives of those who dwell on the street, and it's grabbing and touching at times. Stepek will surely make his name in the horror community with KNUCKLE SUPPER, and many readers will wait with bated breath to see what he writes next.



{comments on}