

BOOKS

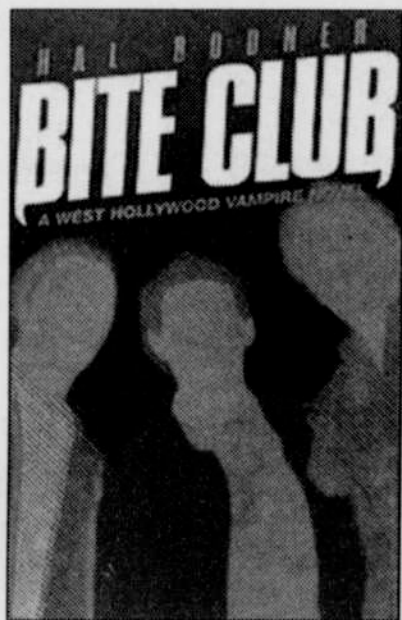
# The vampire strikes back

*Hum* sucks readers in; *Club* just bites

BY JEMIAH JEFFERSON

Combining two different genres into a single work can be a challenge for any writer, particularly the tricky combination of horror and comedy. Pet boutique owner and West Hollywood resident Hal Bodner took this challenge for his debut novel, the unfortunately titled *Bite Club* (Alyson Publications, 2005; \$14.95 softcover), taking the risk that grisly vampire slayings, WeHo city council intrigues, a compulsive-eating but sassy straight female coroner and rampant violent slapstick would form a cohesive whole. It doesn't, in a big way.

The happy-go-lucky coroner, Becky O'Brien, is a medical genius and is almost never seen without some candy or dessert on its way into her mouth, or smeared all over her face. When the coroner's office becomes swamped with the blood-drained corpses of waxed, toned pretty boys, she calls upon the help of her old college friend Chris Driscoll, who happens to be a vampire himself, to get to the bottom of the mystery. Chris moves out to West Hollywood to help Becky, with his extremely annoying, flamboyant young protégé, Troy, preceding him to get a little decorating done—



and of course stir up some trouble so that the quieter, devoted Chris can flex a little vampire fang in defense of him.

Unfortunately, Bodner lets his own enthusiasm for the story run away with him, populating the novel with characters both clichéd and unbelievable, and displaying more attitude than storytelling. It's a shame he isn't as funny as he thinks he is; if he were, this novel would be a riot.

More successful is Calgary, Alberta, author Suzette Mayr's strange, dreamlike *Venous Hum* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2005; \$16.95 softcover),

which is something like a dark-comedy, lesbian, Canadian *Romy and Michele's High School Reunion*. The book is extremely sparse on horror elements, waiting to introduce them until more than halfway through the novel, but the uncanny is never far from the surface, and nothing is ever completely what it seems.

Lai Fun Kugelheim, though she's married

to the lovely and successful Jennifer and mother of baby Fredrick (named after the homosexual king of Prussia), is having an affair with Thor, the husband of her best friend, Stefanja, to her own confusion and distaste. After the death of one of their high school classmates, the perky Stefanja decides to organize a 20-year reunion "before anybody else dies." In the process,

Lai Fun sees Stefanja returning to the same clique of square, plastic, hypocritical popular kids as in high school, and can't help feeling the familiar alienation all over again. Lai Fun finds herself in the midst of teen-age memories of the struggle of being a biracial, queer outcast, tangling up an already complicated present of trying to keep her affair a secret, managing a second pregnancy and spending time with her extremely strange immigrant mother, who is a strict vegetarian...most of the time. Though the novel is not



always successful—in particular, its culmination throws all logic to the wind and seems hardly connected with the first 200 pages—Mayr's characters are original, well-drawn and fresh, her slightly off-kilter alternate reality full of surprises and relationship intrigues. Unfortunately, the sharp satire and soap-opera complex web of relationships eventually muddy the waters, and the author's post-post-modern approach to structure holds the reader at a distance. **J**

Portland st\*rj\*ck\*r JEMIAH JEFFERSON is the author of *Voice of the Blood*, *Wounds* and *Fiend*.



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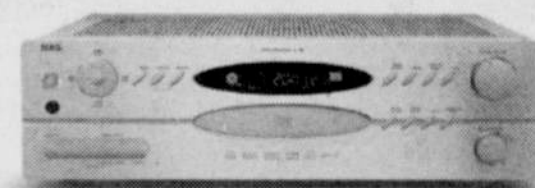
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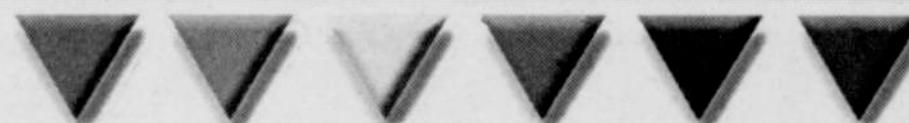


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