

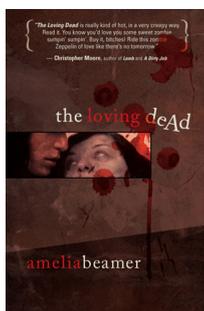
“THE LOVING DEAD” (Book Review)

Written by Jorge Solis
Sunday, 11 July 2010 12:40



Expect nothing less than raunchy humor and unrelenting gore from **THE LOVING DEAD: THE ULTIMATE ZOMBIE LOVE STORY** by Amelia Beamer (pictured), out this week from Night Shade Books. What was supposed to be a fun costume party thrown by two housemates unfortunately ends up as the early stage of an undead plague.

When a party crasher unexpectedly infects one of their drunken friends, Kate and Michael have no idea how to confront this situation. No matter how many zombie movies Michael has seen, he still finds himself unprepared for the worst. What makes this outbreak different from the countless others? Zombieism is here conceived as a sexually transmitted disease: Victims turn into voracious flesh eaters who grow increasingly promiscuous as each minute goes by.



During the mayhem, Kate realizes she can't keep her secrets hidden any longer from her roommate. Distraught with emotion, Michael now faces his entire world turned topsy-turvy. He didn't know beforehand about Kate's elder gentleman, a sugar daddy who pays for her services, and is split between the woman standing right next to him, Audrey, and the woman who is emotionally far away, Kate.

THE LOVING DEAD's narration switches back and forth between the pair of protagonists, allowing the reader to witness two contrasting sides of the ever-growing outbreak. Both find themselves in bizarre predicaments after becoming separated. In a zeppelin, flying 1,300 feet in the air, Kate becomes hostage in a packed room full of horny zombies. Michael unintentionally delivers the injured Audrey to a hospital, where the undead are already waiting in the emergency room.

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The line between satire and parody is kept in balance as Beamer makes social comments about popular culture. After being trapped in the zeppelin, Kate’s only weapon in hand is her iPhone. Using one of the downloadable apps, she impulsively waves the smartphone around to make a loud whipping sound, which suddenly compels the flesheating passengers to back off.

What follows afterward is a grim picture of the escalating devastation in San Francisco. As the zombie count starts accumulating, bloggers jump onto Twitter, Facebook and other social networks to spread the terrifying news. What would most likely be the safest place to hide from the zombie horde? In order to protect themselves, uninfected civilians escape to the former federal prison on Alcatraz. But can Michael and Kate stay human long enough to meet each other there?

From start to finish, this novel is a true page-turner. Though the concluding section drags just a bit, the ending is still an unpredictable surprise. Beamer, a writer/editor for noted science fiction magazine *Locus* making her debut as a novelist, is a talented author whose quick, sharp prose hits the mark, as she precisely shifts back and forth between humor and drama. In the beginning, these are 20something slackers who are deeply afraid of commitment. Soon, they will learn a harsh lesson: Only real friends kill friends who become zombies. Beamer has crafted a dark yet comic variation on the undead-uprising subgenre, and I definitely cannot wait for her follow-up. (Several chapters are available on-line at www.ameliabeamer.com .)



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