Written by Nick Masercola
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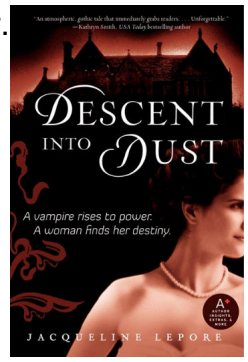
Vampires are everywhere these days, which comes as no surprise. Whether in television or movies, novels or comic books, it seems like the audience's desire for bloodsuckers (and their hunters) is becoming far more insatiable than the monsters' own thirst for blood. But as is the case with any popular horror icon, vampires have—ahem—lost their bite, straying so far from their Gothic horror roots one could scarcely even believe they are the same monster.

If your interest in the modern vampire is waning, diluted by the lack of true scares and mystery in the modern TWILIGHT-style interpretations, maybe you just need to take a trip into the past. Called "deliciously macabre" by BOOKLIST, DESCENT INTO DUST (Avon A; softcover; $13.99) is the recently released first novel in the Emma Andrews vampire slayer series, a bloodsucker tale set in the mid-1800s, steeped in the foreboding shadows of looming castles and foggy moors.

"I like the era because it's inherently spooky," the book's author, Jacqueline Lepore, tells Fango. "It's the last bastion before the modern era…when superstitions and legends still existed as cultural truths for so many people."

The story of DESCENT INTO DUST, which hit shelves this past Tuesday, revolves around a young widow named Emma Andrews who arrives at her cousin's countryside manor during the time of a mysterious plague. Meanwhile, Emma begins to see ghosts roaming the grounds, and her family begins to worry she is losing her mind, just as her mother did at her age. What starts as a mystery novel eventually transforms into Emma's acceptance of her own destiny—that of a vampire hunter. Plus a guy named Dracula shows up as further spice in this Victorian page turner.



“The concept of how women lived in the past has long been a source of fascination for me,” says Lepore. “I’ve often thought (or rather dreaded) what it would be like for someone like me, who has been able to work both in my profession as a psychologist and as a fiction writer, to have lived in the past when those kinds of opportunities would not have been available to me. So with Emma, here’s a woman who HAS to act like a man to take charge.

“In many ways she is a modern woman, true—and while we look at her as a hero, in her world she’s an oddball, an intellectual, a misfit. And that conflict is part of what makes her struggle so interesting. That and nasty, nasty vampires.”

And the creatures in DESCENT INTO DUST are nasty, harkening back to the early days of vampire fiction, when these fanged fiends were far more interested in biting your neck than kissing it. “It has all the old style trappings—stakes, salt, garlic, coffins…it is different from other series’ that have innovated the rules away from the old world prescriptions.” In a genre that has ballooned out of proportion, it is a great comfort to read a book that tries to return the vampire mythology back to its roots. However, Lepore’s original intent for the potential franchise was far different.

“I always wanted this to be a series,” the author says. “The concept was, however, to have this as a Victorian/Agatha Christie style mystery series.” But as the concept began to develop, so did a massive change in direction. “I always loved supernatural books and movies and once I made the leap to using supernatural beings and forces and all of that, the ideas really started to flow. That’s how I knew I was onto something good.”

Apparently critics agree, as DESCENT INTO DUST has received great reviews since debuting, prompting the question of what’s next for Lepore. “I’m concentrating on the Emma Andrews series,” she says. “THE CYPRIAN QUEEN is due out next year, and I am currently working on THE DARK WALTZ, the third installment.”

For updates on the series’ future, visit the author’s website at jacquelinelepore.com or the Facebook group Emma Andrews, Vampire Hunter.