



Embers

Laura Bickle

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Truth burns.

Unemployment, despair, anger—visible and invisible unrest feed the undercurrent of Detroit’s unease. A city increasingly invaded by phantoms now faces a malevolent force that further stokes fear and chaos throughout the city.

Anya Kalinczyk spends her days as an arson investigator with the Detroit Fire Department, and her nights pursuing malicious spirits with a team of eccentric ghost hunters. Anya—who is the rarest type of psychic medium, a Lantern—suspects a supernatural arsonist is setting blazes to summon a fiery ancient entity that will leave the city in cinders. By Devil’s Night, the spell will be complete, unless Anya—with the help of her salamander familiar and the paranormal investigating team—can stop it.

Anya’s accustomed to danger and believes herself inured to loneliness and loss. But this time she’s risking everything: her city, her soul, and a man who sees and accepts her for everything she is. Keeping all three safe will be the biggest challenge she’s ever faced.

Embers Details

Date : Published March 30th 2010 by Pocket (first published March 8th 2010)

ISBN : 9781439167656

Author : Laura Bickle

Format : Mass Market Paperback 359 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Urban Fantasy, Paranormal, Ghosts, Demons, Dragons, Fiction

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From Reader Review Embers for online ebook

Nan says

I picked up this book on recommendation from Angie; she really enjoyed reading an urban fantasy that was set in Detroit.

As someone that's worked in Detroit for the past seven years, I was also eager to read this book. I don't live in the city, but I've worked there long enough to see the cycles of hope and improvement followed by despair and unemployment that plague this city. I've long thought that Detroit was a city calling out for urban fantasy. It's a location rich in history and darkness the like of which is hard to find elsewhere in the US.

With so many expectations, I couldn't help but be disappointed by Bickle's novel. Bickle clearly knows the area. She referenced major landmarks and understood the relationship between the city and the suburbs surrounding it. Anya even lives in Ferndale, a city just north of the city limits of Detroit. All of this was refreshing. Like me, Bickle may not be a resident of Detroit, but she knows the city reasonably well.

I had two major complaints with this book. First, I thought it was a little excessive for Detroit to be plagued by a supernatural arsonist approaching Devil's Night. For those of you that may not be aware of the significance of Devil's Night in Detroit, it's a night where a number of people commit arson. You can read a Wikipedia article about it [here](#).

The second complaint had to do with the issue of race. Bickle notes when a security guard is of Hispanic descent, and her main character's last name is Kalinczyk, which would seem to indicate a Polish background (not unreasonable at all in this area). However, she doesn't mention when characters are African American. As often happens when a writer doesn't mention race at all in a book, the default behavior is to assume that all of the characters are white, which is extremely problematic when writing about Detroit. As a whole, the genres of science fiction and fantasy have a problem under representing non white characters, and this is something that cannot be ignored when writing about Detroit.

I did enjoy the novel itself, and as with most of my friends, I'd have to say my favorite character was Sparky. I will read the next book, and I look forward to the other stories that Bickle can tell about my city. That said, I really hope that she can address the issues I've mentioned here.

If you're curious about the Detroit Institute of Art or the Public Library, I've uploaded a few pictures that I took in April 2010 [here](#).

Blodeuedd Finland says

I do love a good sidekick and this book had such a good one. A salamander named Sparky who chased cats and licked toasters cos he likes electricity.

But to the book then. Anya can see ghosts and eats them. Well the bad ones as she does not always feel good afterwards. She is a Lantern. She was not kick-ass but at the same time she was. She was more protective kick-ass. A former firefighter turned fire investigator. To serve and protect. That is who she is. She loves this city.

The story is about her chasing after an arsonist. Can I say more? Well it has darker undertones and here we learn so much more about this world. Demons, ancient mythology, dragons. It's really interesting and we also learn more about Anya. As she does not know much about her gifts, or curse.

I have book two so I will read it, I actually started it first by mistake, oh bad me, so I quickly started book 1 instead ;) But book 2 seemed good too.

A good world, interesting story and characters I'd like to learn more about. It felt like a solid beginning to a series.

Michelle, the Bookshelf Stalker Queen of the Undead says

I grew in Detroit. I remember Devil's night. As a kid I thought it was fun being scared of what could possibly happen on the night before Halloween. As a teenager, while watching my neighbor's house burn down, the night had a new horrifying meaning.

When I heard about this book, I pre-ordered it. I didn't know the author and I didn't know what I was getting myself into. All I knew was Devil's night was a great premise for a potentially great story.

Boy was I right. Laura Bickle did such a great job that I was completely and utterly sucked right into the story. Her style of writing was effortless and the flow was perfect. Ms. Bickle obviously has a background in police procedure and it was evident in the story.

Anya Kalinczyk is an arson investigator, and more importantly, a rare type of psychic called a "Lantern". She is on a case involving multiple deadly fires and she suspects another supernatural for setting the blazes. What she doesn't suspect is her reaction to the suspect- another possible Lantern. While Anya is good at her job, she isn't good at being close to anyone. She knows she is different and it is her special abilities that has caused her to keep others away.

One of my favorite characters in the book is Sparky. You will have to read the book to understand my love for this character but he will grow on you and you'll want your own "Sparky"!

Shannon says

3.25 Stars

This is sort of a tough one to review. I've lived south of Detroit for the better part of 25 years. This novel is set in and around Detroit so I knew I had to read it just for that fact alone. **I think that I let the fascination of reading about somewhere that I'm familiar with overshadow some of the book's faults.** By the last page though, it became clear that this was a less-than-perfect book.

Anya Kalinczyk is a fire investigator in Detroit, but she's also a Lantern - she has the ability to see and communicate with ghosts, and also devour them and send their spirits ... somewhere. Anya teams up with a

group of ghost hunters every now and then when they need her help getting rid of some of the more malevolent ghosts. She even helps them out when a girl gets possessed by a demon, and unfortunately that demon proves to cause Anya a bit of indigestion.

Anya's job is getting tougher when someone starts setting fires around the city, and leaving their calling card for her to find: a symbol melted into concrete, a feat that would take a considerable amount of heat. Anya starts to investigate and what she finds is a little closer to home than she anticipated. There's someone else like her in Detroit, but he has his own twisted plan for renovating the city.

Anya's abilities are really different and interesting. **Her personality though, was sort of lacking, and I unfortunately found that to be the case with most of the characters.** On the other hand though, her elemental familiar Sparky, is fantastic. He really stole the show and made this book a lot more enjoyable. I think I might have even deducted a whole star if he hadn't be included. It probably helps that I've had a pet newt since I was little (I think he's immortal, he's pushing 19 years old!) but Sparky the salamander with his Gloworm toy really warmed my heart.

The hook-up Anya has near the end of the book was strange. I wasn't expecting any sex, and I especially didn't expect it to be with the person she chose. It really seemed out of character, although it was sort of sexy.

The ending fizzled. **The build-up to the "final fight" was fantastic, but then it's almost like the author ran out of steam at the end.** This was the most disappointing part of the whole book, and I don't really understand what happened. I also don't like what happened to one of the characters, even though if you were paying any attention you'd see it coming. It seemed kind of a waste of time to create a relationship between him and Anya, and then end things the way they did. Anya's relationship with him seemed kind of pointless and also questioned her integrity, making her seem wishy-washy.

I think even if this had been a 1-star book I'd still read the next just because it's set in Detroit. This book had it's shining moments but it also had it's share of low points, although it wasn't a terrible story. The author has a lot of good ideas, her execution is just a bit off. **I'm going to chalk that up to "first book syndrome" and hope this series only gets better.**

Darcy says

I had high hopes for this one, but it really fell flat for me. At page 60 I find that I just can't bring myself to go on. The book is boring a little tedious for me. The whole salamander thing creeps me out. Anya was wishy washy for me. In the end this book just isn't for me.

Ann Aguirre says

This is an awesome debut. I loved it. The best thing about it was how different and dark and gritty it was. Anya is a different sort of heroine, and Sparky was freakin' awesome. I loved the Detroit setting, and it all felt very real to me. It was also a welcome change of pace from vampires and such.

Embers passed my highest UF test, which means I finished it and immediately gave it to my husband

Andres, saying, "Read this, you'll love it."

He loves UF but he's pickier than I am, so I don't automatically give him every book I enjoy. He read and loved this one as well. The last author to pass the "will be read & loved by both Aguirres" was Kat Richardson, so we're both very excited to have Laura Bickle on board as a shared-author.

Angela James says

I just couldn't warm up to this heroine (there's irony in those words, since she's an arson investigator). I actually got to chapter fourteen and finally just flipped to the end to see what happened. The book had some intriguing elements, and the writing was serviceable, but it lacked that spark that I needed to really draw me into the story (sorry, unintentional play on the whole fire angle, again). The heroine was just too...depressed. For her, everything about her life was hard, she didn't ever let people get close to her, she bordered on anti-social in some ways, we got a lot of "woe is me" backstory and there was just nothing that drew me to connect with her. DNF for me.

Kelly says

(3.5 stars) In her debut novel, Laura Bickle introduces us to Anya Kalinczyk, a woman as troubled as her home city of Detroit. Like many of her sister urban-fantasy heroines, Anya has a tragic past and uses it as a reason to push people away. She works as an arson investigator with the Detroit Fire Department and moonlights with a ghost-hunting team. Anya is a Lantern, which means she has the rare ability to consume ghosts and demons. She also has a familiar spirit, Sparky, a fire elemental who takes amphibian form but acts more like a large dog. (Sparky, needless to say, is adorable.)

A serial arsonist is targeting what seem to be random buildings in the city. Anya discovers that the crimes are ritualistic in nature, and that the perp is planning a grand finale on Devil's Night, just two weeks away. This plotline is exceedingly well done. The investigation scenes are fascinating. The arsonist harbors utopian dreams of urban renewal, and while his methods are despicable, his motives are more complex than is usual in a villain. Bickle incorporates mythology in a really interesting way, mostly Babylonian but with a nifty tie-in to a famous Native American monument. I don't quite "buy" what happens with the villain at the end, but for the most part, this strand of the plot is great. Together with the wonderful character of Sparky, the investigation makes *Embers* a compelling read.

The second plotline is less successful. This strand deals with Anya's spirit-eating talent. While on an assignment with her ghost-hunting colleagues, Anya becomes possessed by a demon. This plotline does tie in with the arson plotline in places, but in other places the fit is iffy. It almost feels like Bickle had two novels and two heroines in her head, and then decided to merge them.

The demon story isn't internally consistent, either. When Mimiveh is possessing the teenage girl, she causes the girl to act out by destroying things and threatening to burn the house down. But when Mimiveh goes into Anya, suddenly she is a sex demon. Bickle could have done a lot with the creepiness of a fifteen-year-old possessed by a sex demon, or if she'd found that idea too disturbing, Mimiveh could have inhabited another grown woman before attaching herself to Anya. Either way, it would have seemed more consistent than what actually happens. As it is, Mimiveh comes across as a plot device to get Anya in touch with her sexuality, an

ardeur of sorts, and the eventual resolution of this aspect is anticlimactic.

Which brings me to the romantic elements. Anya has two potential love interests. One of the romantic subplots jumps to sex abruptly enough that I checked to see if I'd missed a page by accident; the other romantic subplot jumps to the L-word without enough buildup, in my opinion, to justify it. And one of Anya's suitors is just too amoral. I could kind of understand why Anya was drawn to him, but at the same time I wanted to see her muster up the strength to resist him earlier than she did.

That said, *Embers* is worth reading for its well-executed A-plot. I will definitely be checking out the next book in this series, *Sparks*.

Jenne says

I was pleasantly surprised with this book. A unique concept and world building plus...I love it when an author makes you like the evil villain lol. The author also does a good job of painting the scenery of Detroit. Not that I've been there but the author made me feel like I was. I liked Anya and Sparky was great! I think most UF lovers might enjoy this.

Kristine Hansen says

I liked the concept of the Lantern. I loved Sparky. And Anya made for an interesting character, interesting enough that I can look forward to the next book.

The problem I had with this book was that the spell casting, the exorcisms, all done in so much detail let me a little bit outside my comfort zone. I don't usually get ooky about the weird stuff in paranormals, but every once in a while something sets off my radar and I feel a little bit too uncomfortably close to things that are way outside where I want to be spiritually.

It's interesting to note because that doesn't happen often.

So...four stars. I might have given five for setting and characters and, just plain fun narrative if it hadn't been for that element. So perhaps this book might not be for every reader. But for fans of paranormal, it's not a bad way to spend a rainy afternoon.

All Things Urban Fantasy says

Review courtesy of AllThingsUrbanFantasy.blogspot.com

EMBERS has a fantastically gritty cover from the talented Chris McGrath, a paranormally enhanced version of Detroit, and a unique supernatural concept for its main character. With so much going for it, I feel like I should have liked this book more. The blurb sounded exactly like the kind of urban fantasy stories I love...but I struggled almost from the beginning to connect with both the characters and plot.

By day, Anya is an arson investigator with the Detroit Fire Department. After hours, she's a member of the

Detroit Area Ghost Researchers. As a Lantern, Anya has the ability to consume ghosts like a supernatural vacuum cleaner. Her formidable skill comes with a nasty side effect: acid like burns left on her chest after each ghost she “eats.” She and the hodgepodge crew of D.A.G.R members (including a wedding cake designer/witch and an elderly demonologist that reminded me of Professor Xavier from X-Men) bust ghosts, exorcise demons, and keep the city safe from the seedy supernatural elements that lurk in the shadows.

I had a big problem with Anya’s two love interests in EMBERS: Brian the ‘nice’ tech guy from D.A.G.R who has been interested in her for ages. And then there’s Drake, the serial arsonist who is plotting to incinerate Detroit. Neither the ‘nice’ guy or the psycho appealed to me as romantic leads. Brian was fairly innocuous and about as romantically compelling as cardboard, but Drake was a mass murderer with major creep factor. There are other factors in the story that propelled Anya’s relationship with Drake which I won’t divulge, but I still found the attraction between them to be very forced and unrealistic.

I did like Anya’s familiar, a fire elemental salamander named Sparky. He’s more like an invisible magical Saint Bernard who gets jealous when guys hit on Anya, sleeps with a glowworm, and has a mischievous addiction to electricity. The writing itself is also good, I just didn’t find the story to be especially interesting. Every chapter started off with a great opening sentence that devolved into a generic chapter plot wise.

Plenty of other reviewers loved this book. I envy them for it, but I just couldn’t get into it. I did like Laura’s writing style, which is why I’m looking forward to her other series debut Dark Oracle written as Alayna Williams later this summer. I’ll probably pass on the next Anya Kalinczyk book, Sparks when it comes out August 31, 2010.

Sexual Content: References to sex. A brief, mildly graphic sex scene.

Lexie says

Originally I had no intention of reading Embers. I'm a little burned out from Urban Fantasies, at least starting new series, and had resolved to take a break. Best laid plans and such found me buying Embers and then reading it in relatively quick order.

The tone of the novel was much darker than I expected, exploring several deeper emotions such as lust, guilt and personal responsibility in slightly uncomfortable ways (for me at least). Anya is a conflicted young woman with deeply rooted guilt issues and a problem with forming personal connections, not particularly uncommon in today's UF heroines, but Bickle takes it a step forward with Anya's growing fear that one unwary step will burn her life down. Uncertain about the exact nature of her power as a Lantern (spirits are attracted to her like a moth to flame and she has the power to devour them, burning them to nothingness), Anya fights her nature. Meeting the firebug with an oddly do-gooder mentality, confirms her worst fears, but also opens her up to exploring who and what she could be.

The cast surrounding Anya, both supernatural and otherwise, all have distinct personalities. Sparky, her 'hellbender' elemental protectors; Brian, tech geek who cares for her; Katie, organic baker by day, witch by night; Ciro, demonologist and one tough old man; Jules, group leader and fond of slapping Mike upside the head; Mike, the newbie on the crew with a whole lot of enthusiasm and then Captain Marsh, her boss at the Fire department. The firebug, who becomes more important for a variety of reasons as the story goes on, was oddly appealing. He was doing bad things, but I couldn't tell if he was a sociopath, warped from his experiences or genuinely believed he was doing the right thing for the city.

I had a growing fear, as the way to stop SIRRUSH from rising became more and more clear, about what would happen in the end. And it came true. And despite everything that had happened I got misty-eyed and sad. It seemed appropriate, but still.

Book 2, Sparks, is due out at the end of August though there isn't a whole lot out about what it will be about and the end of Embers gives nothing away to give us clues. I am however looking forward to it and have great anticipation for Laura Bickle's alter-ego, Alayna Williams's debut UF Dark Oracle due out in June!

Dark Faerie Tales says

Quick & Dirty: An extraordinary tale of danger, ghosts and magic that will have you clamoring for more.

Opening Sentence: Truth burned. It always burned, even in the dark, cold hours of the morning when nearly everything slept.

The Review:

Anya has a day job as an arson investigator with the Detroit Fire Department. When the freaks come out at night, she works with a ragtag group of ghost hunters aka the Detroit Area Ghost Researchers, fighting the good fight against malevolent spirits. Anya is far from the run of the mill medium that communicates with the dead. She's a Lantern, which is a rare medium that has the ability to devour spirits. It's up to Anya, her loveable familiar Sparky and her ghost hunting crew to stop the supernatural arsonist before Devil's Night or the Motor City will become the city of ashes.

Ms. Bickle pens a dynamite urban fantasy debut complete with fascinating characters, a great action filled plot, set in a very atmospheric, eerie and dark Detroit. Her characters are rich and captivating, fitting nicely into the backdrop of Detroit's gritty and deadly supernatural scene. The plot is fast-paced and the magic is thoroughly integrated into the story, making Embers a real page-turner.

What sets this novel apart from the plethora of "tough as nails" female leads is the great work Ms. Bickle does with characterization. Embers' protagonist, Anya, is a hero, but the nature of her work means Anya also has a dark side. Anya is one of the most multi-dimensional characters in the urban fantasy genre. She's powerful, and tears through the spiritual underworld of Detroit, but it takes a personal toll on her. It was tough to see Anya struggle with isolation and her feelings of being torn between the spirit world and our world. She's also trying to navigate the rocky road of intimate relationships. I don't want to give too much away, but suffice it to say that devouring souls is not without risk. That's not to say Anya is squeamish about devouring spirits. In the end, she's willing to do what it takes to get the job done. She's fiercely loyal to the few people in her life that she really cares about and considers her friends.

Embers' supporting cast of characters round out an already great tale. Anya has an amazing familiar, a five-foot fire salamander named Sparky. What's not to love about Sparky? He has many endearing attributes. He's quirky, loyal and needy to a fault, but he's also Anya's protector. He loves her very much and has a hard time sharing her. Sparky doesn't speak and can only be seen by Anya and ghosts, but nonetheless his presence is felt. Sparky is the one constant in Anya's life and he annoys her as much as he comforts her. It's actually quite touching.

Overall, Embers is an impressive debut. Think Ghost Hunters meets Supernatural and that's just a fraction of

the good times you will get out of reading this book. Ms. Bickle delivers great storytelling, compelling characters, and top-notch worldbuilding. Embers is well written with a fresh and unique mythology. Danger, demons and Devil's Night abound, making this book hard to put down. I'm really looking forward to visiting this gritty and dark world again in the sequel, Sparks.

Notable Scene:

But this wasn't the chill of ice. This demon burned, burned like lye. Tears sprang to her eyes as she struggled with it, trying to destroy this caustic thing that scorched like acid she's sucked behind her lips...

She choked. The hot blackness of the demon crept down her throat in spidery tendrils. She coughed, trying to expel it, but the demon clung to her. She reeled back in the bubbles to the wall of the shower, clawing at her throat. The amber flame in her chest burned brighter, striving to consume this demon that was so much larger and more powerful than she'd expected.

The Anya Kalinczyk Series:

1. Embers

2. Sparks – August 31, 2010

Angie says

I'm fairly certain I ran across my first mention of Laura Bickle's debut urban fantasy EMBERS in one of Doug's alarmingly thorough and most excellent urban fantasy round-ups over at SciFiGuy. And, as always, I responded immediately to the Chris McGrath cover art. His style works for me and I liked the wavering title font, the torque around the woman's neck, and the burning city behind her. Little did I know how accurate the attention to detail on all of these elements was. Having read the book, I love the cover even more. It's one of those rare things in the publishing world--a perfect fit. EMBERS came at just the right time for me as well. I've been in just the teensiest bit of a funk, mostly to do with real life stress (sick husband, sick daughter, work silliness, etc) and one day I found myself at the bookstore with my boy--the two healthy ones out for some air--and we decided we would each pick out one book to take home with us. He chose a Calvin & Hobbes. I went with EMBERS. We both of us have been extremely pleased with our purchases.

Anya Kalinczyk's life seems to be going up in smoke. As a former fire fighter and current arson investigator for the Detroit Fire Department, she's used to skirting flames. But it's her private life that's got her treading too close to danger these days. Anya is a Lantern--a very rare type of psychic medium whose primary ability is sucking up spirits. By day she tracks down your run-of-the mill arsonists, by night she prowls the city with a ragtag group of ghost hunters, locating and neutralizing malevolent spirits lurking beneath Detroit's rough exterior. But Anya's tired of it all. Every ghost she swallows takes a toll on her emotionally and physically and, after one last rather grisly job, she informs the gang that it will be her last. She's going home to curl up with her salamander familiar Sparky and wake up to a less chaotic life. Unfortunately, her friend Brian--the resident tech geek in the group--has a hard time letting go. And the thing is Anya likes Brian. She likes him a lot. But every time she's gotten close to someone in the past, it's quite literally blown up in her face. The people she loves tend to get hurt and she has no interest in that happening to the lovable iPod listening, night vision goggle toting computer lab guru who's got a crush on her. But that's before her professional and private lives collide when a supernatural arsonists begins systematically burning up buildings across the city

and Anya is the only one who can put the pieces of the puzzle together. She can't do it alone. But how many of her friends and co-workers will die before the force behind the flames is destroyed?

EMBERS is exactly what I was hoping it would be--just a killer debut urban fantasy. I connected with the characters immediately, but almost as importantly, I connected with the setting. My favorite urban fantasy series feature a place that is as much of a character as the supes and beasts that call it home. And I absolutely loved Bickle's burning Detroit, a city on the verge of consuming itself. A city, as Anya bleakly observes, that no sane person would want to stay in, but that she can't help but hope some will. Someone with the vision to reinvest and rebuild in the future of both the city and the isolated residents who walk its dying streets. The narrative is dotted with very real glimpses into the gritty lives of everyday people on the streets. These are thrown into relief by the side-by-side depictions we get of those other everyday people who died and are lingering for whatever reason. The effect is at once thoughtful and haunting. As for Anya, she's my kind of heroine. She fights the good fight every single day, despite her doubts and uncertainty, despite her fragmented history, despite the very real ghosts that plague her. Luckily, she has one of the best sidekicks I've run across in awhile. A salamander protector--brilliant! Sparky solidifies into the torque she wears around her neck night and day, though he loves nothing more than to slither into corporeal form to chase ghosts with Anya and play with any electrical source he can find. Their relationship is sweet and funny as Sparky is the one being she's never without. I enjoyed all the secondary characters as well, particularly the refreshingly normal (though by no means boring Brian), her good friend and organic witch/baker Katie, and the dark man behind the recent reign of fire himself. This is a dark, serious, and intense read and I was especially satisfied with the resolution. This is the first in a series and yet Ms. Bickle happily resisted the temptation to leave a million and a half plot threads hanging. There are several directions the next book could take, of course, but I finished EMBERS satisfied and I can't thank her enough for that. A fantastic new urban fantasy and highly recommended. I can't wait for SPARKS, which is due out the end of August.

Katie(babs) says

If Laura Bickle ever needed a theme song for her debut novel, Embers, it would have to be Fire Burning by Sean Kingston. That song kept running through my head as I read. There are a whole lot of fires burning due to a supernatural arsonist bent on revenge. The one person who may be the only one to stop this madman is Anya Kalinczyk, an arson investigator for the Detroit Fire Department. It's bad enough that Detroit is riddled with crime and unemployment, including a bad case of hauntings and demons who won't behave. Anya knows all about the shady, ghostly side of the city because is a volunteer working with the Detroit Area Ghost Researchers. Anya has a very special skill. She is known as a Lantern, a psychic medium who sucks up spirit's soul and destroys them, especially after they refuse to leave a house or building. Anya is pretty much done with the Ghost Hunters because she is dealing with a great amount of stress. Not only does her salamander familiar, Sparky, who she can only see, is always under foot, and has a bad habit of eating most electronics, but one of the hunters, Brian, an IT guy who works at the local university, wants to be more than just associates. Anya is not comfortable with the dating scene and tries her best to keep Brian at a distance.

Around the same time the arsons continue to grow out of control, Anya has become possessed by a nasty demon she helped exorcise from a teenage girl. The demon Mimiveh starts to haunt her dreams and talks about SIRRUSH, a Godzilla like demon who is compared to a force of nature that destroys anything in its path with no reason. And it looks like the arsonist wants to summon SIRRUSH for their own gain.

Soon Anya's life is spinning out of control. If it's not bad enough that she has a demon trying to take over her body, the arsonist makes contact with her and believes they have a connection because he also is a Lantern.

Because Anya has always felt alone and doesn't know many others like her, she walks a fine line, and is slowly being seduced, over come with need for this man who wants to know everything about her. He will try his best to make her understand why he must continue to hurt innocent people. But when someone close to Anya almost dies because of the Lantern arsonist, she is no longer sympathetic to his cause and will walk through the fires of hell to stop him

Embers is a very unique, not your typical run of the mill urban fantasy. Laura Bickle's writing reminds me a bit of Diana Rowland's demon series. Anya is somewhat comparable to Rowland's heroine, Kara Gillian. I think this is because both women are in some sort of law enforcement, have special powers and surround themselves with many caring individuals. Anya is more of a loner, and at times confused and scared. Her relationship with her familiar Sparky is really wonderful and made me smile. I especially enjoyed Anya friendship with the baker/witch Katie who is a therapist of sort to Anya and gives her advice and a shoulder to lean on.

The first part of Embers is really wonderful with a great deal of action and suspense. It falters toward the middle and end where Anya is grappling with two issues. Whereas I enjoyed the arson investigation and preferred more a focus on that, the whole demon possession of Anya becomes more of a nuisance. I really felt it wasn't needed and took away from the primary storyline regarding the Lantern villain who Anya almost succumbs to. The arsonist is revealed early on and isn't the hard-core villain everyone makes him out to be. He has been wronged and feels he has no other choice with his decisions. Anya has a very touchy relationship with him that's written in a very interesting way. Their relationship goes past a certain point that most urban fantasy type heroines don't fall into. I wanted more interaction between these two, but unfortunately, the whole demon storyline overtook everything in such a way that ruined the overall effect I was expecting.

As debuts go, I would say Embers is a pretty solid read and the start of a series that I wouldn't mind continue reading. Other then too much of an emphasis on the annoying Linda Blair Exorcist type drama, I would say that Laura Bickle is one to pay attention to, especially if you are looking for a new unique Urban Fantasy series to read.

Kathryn says

It took longer than I prefer to feel attached to this book and the start was very slow yet I was hooked by the end. Urban fantasy is best in my opinion when the supporting cast is strong and I loved the secondary characters in this book. First books are always the most difficult for me but the setting felt real, I loved how myth was intertwined so well with the plot, and I love the world the writer has created.

There are no werewolves or vampires here so this might be a breath of fresh air for UF fanatics. The book also had a very strong undertone of sadness, with a bit more death apparent than some UFs I've read. I think that might have contributed to my initial lack of connection. Even the bit of humor didn't quite outweigh the sadness for me, even when I laughed aloud at Sparky, one of the best characters/creatures in an UF I've ever read. The ending was excellent and I can't wait to see what happens next.

Catherine says

When I first saw the description for this book I was intrigued. I hadn't read anything like it before, so, yay, unique setting! The world of Lanterns, ghosts, and elemental spirits was an interesting one. I liked the thought of the DAGR group, but the thought was much more exciting than the execution. I'll get to that though.

I appreciated the fact that Anya questioned what she did as a Lantern. She did it, yes, but not without questioning the morality of it. Who was she to interfere with the afterlife? Where did they go after she finished with them? As those were the very same questions running through my mind I liked that she had them too. Anya's elemental, Sparky, was my favorite character. The description of him was so cute. He had a glow worm toy and didn't like to sleep alone.

I liked how the ghosts were presented in this story. In most of the books I've read ghosts are presented one of two ways. They're either crazy and malicious or they're living life as normal, except for the dead part. Here we saw the malicious ones and the interactive ones (the library ghost) but we also saw another side of them. So many of the ghosts in this book were stuck in an endless loop. They didn't seem to know they were dead and they just kept endlessly repeating the last hours of their lives. It was sad.

So, if I liked all that why is this graded so low? Well, it wasn't the idea of the story that I had a problem with. It was the execution. This book read in a kind of monotone for me. The characters, even Anya, all seemed flat and bland to me. The events also seemed to unfold in a plodding, uneventful manner. It's hard to describe exactly what I mean. Everything seemed so surface, there was no real depth to anything. It was easy for the events to blur because there were no highs or lows. It just... plodded to the end.

The group DAGR had the potential to be interesting, but we never really got to know any of them. We almost got some depth to Katie, the witch, but her whole role was to be there when Anya needed something. We never got any insight into her actual character. Also, the fact that DAGR couldn't accomplish anything without Anya made them seem bumbling and foolish. It was hard to take them seriously.

Brian, one of Anya's love interests, was also a member of DAGR. Because we were presented with Anya and Brian's non-relationship when it was already established it was hard to see why they were so interested in each other. When Anya longs for Brian but can't risk him getting close it was not interesting to me as a reader. I don't know him further beyond his name and his job. Why would I care?

Anya's other love interest had more depth and was much more interesting, but their attraction made no sense. I thought it was highly unintelligent that she would risk her job for that. The sex scene in the book came out of nowhere too. All of a sudden they were doing it and I felt I missed something. Also, what happened with her job? She got suspended, but then she was back... why? Nothing was resolved in a legal sense. Why was she back at work? That made no sense.

The whole situation with Mimi was rather weak too. Anya felt she couldn't impose on Katie since she cut her ties with DAGR. Why exactly? Weren't you friends? You're an idiot. Your procrastinating made the situation almost impossible to fix. It was only by luck it was fixed at all. Also, what exactly was Mimi's plan? Anya's a gift, I get that, but why? The book was just frustrating to read.

Kelly H. (Maybedog) says

I felt this was a bit different from the usual urban fantasy fare and I really enjoyed it. The protagonist was

practical and fairly normal. She has a day job that she loves and it's one that it's hard for women to break into (though that's not mentioned) but she's moved up in the ranks. The descriptions of what it was like to be a firefighter were very good.

The plot was interesting. Though it was clear where it was going from about a third of the way in, the book was still entertaining. The action was mostly good and the beautiful thing was that she kept saving the guys or they got in the way when they tried to help. Once a man jumped in to save her from the baddie when she had the situation under control and as a result said bad guy got away. The last battle was terrific. I just prefer more almost dying on the heroine's part and another character being terrified for her. It probably means I'm sick in the head or something. She was never in enough p

The characterization was so good, that I figured out one guy was Hispanic and several other were African American simply by how she portrayed them. She didn't once tell us the color of anyone's skin. I really liked that because it really bothers me that most writers only mention what color someone's skin is if the person isn't white. And to write a character so well that not mentioning it still puts a clear picture in my head of what the person looks like, including race, is quite a skill.

The character herself wears normal everyday clothing. When she has to dress up she hates it and finally stalks out. At that late hour the only place she can find open is a fetish shop and even then she chose really practical clothes including heels you could dance in. She may not be able to describe a torque (how can a torque that looks like a salamander draped around her neck then have the tail in the salamander's mouth? That would make a loop which is not a torque.

The salamander character however is wonderful and different from the usual familiar/companion of UF protagonists. It's funny and the descriptions are excellent and very believable as an animal as well as her helper.

There were a few awkward things, like in the beginning she assumes the arsonist didn't take anything or look around because the elevator was on the top floor. Then at some point she says he takes his time. He could have looked around and taken small expensive things that he didn't need an elevator for.

Another time is when she has a doctor wearing nurses scrubs. I have never ever seen a doctor in a hospital wear a scrub top with fairies on it and without the white coat no less and I worked in a hospital for a while. Albeit, I worked in IT but still. The hierarchy in medicine is incredibly indelible. Doctors are referred to by last name, nurses by first for starters. And FYI, Circe was not a demon she was a sorceress and somewhat justified in her actions because of how she was treated as a powerful woman (this was just said in passing so it's not a spoiler).

This is a very minor point in the book but it prickled me: A character says basically that urban renewal can't happen in poor areas, the people need plain rectangles in which to live and that the person saying otherwise is out of touch with the poor. This is clearly ridiculous as some of the poorest communities can get together and reclaim a portion of their rundown areas and create amazing parks mostly by getting volunteers and sometimes with donations. Building a new home that isn't a rectangular box isn't really any more expensive or habitat for humanity would build them. When a community has character and art and design that reflects their world view, that area has more pride in itself and it's easier to keep the area from worsening and can often help the people by boosting self esteem etc. I'm not sure if she was trying to say something else but it bothered me that she was trying to represent the poor and was in turn compartmentalizing them.

One of the best parts is that at one point, a firefighter goes into a burning building just to rescue a woman's

dogs who all survive.

So despite the small points mentioned above, I wanted to give the book five stars. But...

I like it when characters are not black and white. I like when the evil doer has some pieces of humanity and the good guys make bad mistakes. The world isn't black and white no matter how much we want it to be. But the only character who has no redeeming value is one who is supposed to be a "good" character and that annoys me, especially given that the bad guy isn't completely bad. Having a complexity of good and bad doesn't mean that we as people shouldn't judge people on the majority of their actions or the ones that are particularly heinous. For example, you can have the nicest sweetest man who creates a charity and volunteers at the at-risk-youth center and has supporters and fans all over the US for the good he does as a coach. But if he then also molests and rapes boys, he is not a good guy, not at all. He is not a sympathetic character and shouldn't be.

So bringing us back to the book,
(view spoiler)

But despite this thing that makes me really mad, it's a good book and the rest of the time I really like the character. She's a good person and people love her. The author is a good writer (there were a couple of awkward sentences in the beginning but not again). Because she's that good and I loved everything else so much, I'm only taking one star off for the spoiler above. I'm definitely reading the next book soon but there are only two so far. That seems to be my luck lately: books I don't like have the number of titles in the series in the double digits and the books I love have only two or three. I am so impatient. I want them now!

Larissa says

My Rating: 3 & 1/2 stars out of 5!

I absolutely love the Urban Fantasy (UF) genre, along with Paranormal Romance, it definitely gets the top spot in my heart as for my taste in reading. It is specially amazing when a new book or series comes along with a new take on an old theme or deals with a subject that hasn't been written about before.

Embers is all about fire and fire creatures, it tells the story of Anya, a Arson Investigator for the Detroit Fire department that is also a Lantern. She can see and consume spirits with ease and in her free time, she helps the DAGR and group that fights demons and evil spirits.

Anya has got job cut out for her when a series of arsons leave a number of victims and weird looking marks that point to a much more sinister reason for the fires, than simple insurance fraud.

Embers is pure UF with action, mythical elements, a great cast of supporting characters, an ambivalent villain, mythical creatures and a great plot that grips you until the end. I have to admit that the beginning was a bit slow for me, but it did pick about a third way in and it got great.

Anya is a very interesting and complex character. I loved how flawed she was and even though she got on

my nerves a few time, in the end she is just human and flawed, therefore making her more lovable in my opinion.

Anya is not a kick-ass kind of leading lady, but she is definitely strong and capable of making though choices and decisions. I loved her blooming relationship with Brian, I feel there is a lot of potential there and it makes me really happy that there will be at least another book in this series.

All in all, Embers is a full plate of goodness for any Urban Fantasy lover out there. Intriguing plot and great characters that definitely make it a great read. I can't wait to get my hands on the next book, Sparks, coming out at the end of August this year.

Cathy says

3.25 stars. I like that Anya feels like a normal woman just trying to do her best. She's not a born hero, despite the talents she was born with. She's a regular woman who's trying to balance her job and her other responsibilities, working hard to make herself into a person she can respect. I love Sparky and his Glowworm, too cute. I like the DAGR scooby gang, it's not an original idea but it's well executed. I like the use of ghosts, there's a nice feeling of reality to it somehow; it's done with a scale that made it feel like, yeah, that could be happening. And many of the ghosts had a lot of charm. I also like the use of some mythological elements.

What I don't like at all was the bad guy. There is a strong attempt to make a mass murderer sympathetic. His whole premise is too super-villain/I'm going to do a good thing by doing awful things, but it's absurd. It's really awful and Anya's action toward him really weakened her character. I also didn't like the whole demon sub-plot. I thought it was a set-up for future books, which might have been cool. But the way it was abruptly resolved was completely lame and made the entire plot a overly coincidental and unnecessary distraction. I also don't really like the other romantic interest, the connection happened before the book began so I felt no sense of investment in their relationship.

Overall as a first book it was enjoyable and I hope to see improvement in the next book.
