

A MURDER MYSTERY WITH BITE



S.W. FAIRBROTHER

# The Secret Dead

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## **The Secret Dead** S.W. Fairbrother

Vivia Brisk knows about the dead. She should. She's died enough times.

Vivia is a hag, one of the last of her race, and can die, visit the underworld, and return at will. She loves her job helping London's most vulnerable supernaturals, even if her colleague Malcolm drives her round the bend on a daily basis.

Then Malcolm is outed as a zombie, and along with his teenage son, flees the police. When Malcolm is captured, he is only able to pass on one message before his dead brain degrades completely: 'He killed me.'

When the police find decades-old corpses hidden near Malcolm's home, Vivia begins to realise Malcolm's still-missing son is in a lot more danger than from just a possible zompocalypse...

## **The Secret Dead Details**

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Author : S.W. Fairbrother

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## From Reader Review The Secret Dead for online ebook

### Heather Blair says

‘London is built on the bones of its dead.’

Vivia should know, she is a death hag who can die and cross over to the underworld at will. She can also recognize the undead, even when they appear perfectly normal. Both skills are invaluable as Vivia lives in a modern-day, alternate version of London, where magic is real and zombies rate their own branch of Scotland Yard.

Vivia works for a charity that works to ensure the rights of the many-varied and colorful assortment of non-humans that populate this world, she also does consulting work for the police on the side.

It is very hard to pigeon-hole this book and that’s one of the many things I found utterly delightful about it. Part detective novel, part alternate reality/magic realism, part impending zombie apocalypse thriller and 100% unique.

In the interest of full disclosure, the author had put out an open read and review request on Goodreads, offering a free copy in return for an honest review. I saw the request, but when I checked out the book and sample on Amazon, it intrigued me enough I just bought in on my own at the full price, as I like to support indie authors when possible. And I am so glad I did!

I don’t want to give too much away, as you really need to experience this fascinatingly complex, but easily assimilated world with its fully-fleshed (or not!) characters for yourself. I was kept guessing throughout and being a reader who routinely figures out the ending far in advance, that was wonderfully refreshing.

There is very little to criticize here; one or two grammatical errors, a tad of character confusion (there is such a large cast, that seems inevitable, tho) and towards the end, there was one resolution that seemed unlikely, but not inconceivable. The writing does not come off as a first-time effort at all, the plot twists are subtle and skillful, the character building detailed and believable and the background reveal slow and mesmerizing. I was left drop-jawed more than once. I am so glad the 2nd book is supposed to be out in winter, I definitely want to visit this world again and find out where Vivia goes from here.

If you are tired of clichés and done to death plots, I cannot recommend this fresh and original book enough!

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### Cara Reading says

This book is absolutely AMAZING. In the saturated paranormal field, it is a bit difficult to come up with something completely new, but Fairbrother managed it. Well written, with a fantastic cast of characters, The Secret Dead takes place in an alternate of our world, with shifters, witches, fae, and all sorts of other creatures exist. Vivia Brisk is the main character and a death hag- definitely not you picture perfect heroine, but there she is, warts and all (literally).

In a case which, I admit, is somewhat confusing, Vivia assist the police in searching for her now zombified ex-coworker and his missing son. Things become more and more confusing complicated once old secrets come to light, but Vivia bravely wanders through it all, Never mind that she really doesn’t know how to be a death hag, or the limits and extent of her powers. Brisk’s character isn’t a superhero, she’s just a girl (who happens to be able to die and come back to life) barely scrapping by, taking care of her invalid sister, never aging step-father, and ignoring her mothers corpse in the attic.

I can't even say enough good things about this book. It's not perfect, but it is such a unique and different story, I feel like giving it less than four stars would be short-changing it. If you are looking for a good paranormal mystery, one where you won't be able to guess on page three who-dun-it, this should be in your "to read" pile. I can't recommend this book enough! Please, do yourself a favor, and buy this book. Fair warning though: it ends with a huge cliffhanger. When you are finished, you can join me in a letter writing campaign to Fairbrother so that she hurries up and publishes the next book!

1/5 flames for hotness...please visit [sslyblog.wordpress.com](http://sslyblog.wordpress.com) for more reviews and other fun content!

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### **Fangs for the Fantasy says**

Vivia is a Hag, born with the ability to die and pass into the underworld (not very magical) and come back (most certainly magical). It has also gifted her with an ancient and, thankfully, absent mother and a sadly harmed sister who she now has to look after

She works for a charity her step father dubs "citizens advice for the supernatural" which is accurate – everyone needs help navigating the legal and bureaucratic mazes of Britain, the hated supernaturals are definitely no exception.

Then one of her colleagues becomes a zombie – and goes on the run. A zombie apocalypse is terrifying enough to lock down the city and Vivia steps up to find her co-worker and his son, going places where the police (and past antipathy with the supernatural) cannot; and uncovering secrets that have been buried a long time.

The first thing I have to praise about this book is the world – an alternate magical London with all kinds of monsters and magic lurking around the corners. But it's not just a magical London, it's not just a magical London with overt supernatural; but a London with a MUNDANE supernatural.

This is a London where our protagonist, a Hag, has to take the tube. This is a London where shapeshifters sue for housing discrimination and trolls have to fill out unemployment forms. This is a supernatural London with a department in charge of cleaning up magical leakages. This is a London that deals with zombie outbreaks with police and special forces and lockdowns (which people ignore, of course) and where the zombie virus can be caught as an STD.

It's a world where the supernatural is part of the mundane, in part if is gritty simply because of the mundanity of it. Not because it's super grim dark – but because it's every bit as grim as our reality is – and that's "grim" not "grimdark". It isn't hyper awful with film noir-esque monologues about how terrible everyone is – it's grim in the sense that the every day can be grim. The grind of daily life, of working a thankless job for an underfunded charity protecting the rights of a much despised group. It's not easy, there are difficult decisions to be made – and it's all so very mundane.

And when you can make werehamsters, people with wings and a weresnake orphanage mundane, that takes some extremely good writing.

The magical world is also, as can be guessed, unusual. Shapeshifters come in all kinds of shapes and sizes

for all kinds of creatures. We have weresnakes where their snake form is based on the cultural consciousness of the area (so in England largely cobras and giant pythons because that is what we picture when we think “snake”). We have a variety of ghosts in their various afterlives – it’s a really fascinating underworld with some truly excellent concepts – like the ghost who eats constantly in their afterlife because they were starved to death and they’re desperately trying to deal with the trauma of that death. It’s just one element of interesting complexity this world often hints towards – like the ethical conflict over what to do with the zombies; without human flesh they degenerate and rot, a terrible fate. But their bite spreads zombiedom – hence zombie apocalypse and the utter terror. At one time zombies were burned to death which sounds horrific but is also seen as preferable to the rotting alternative – leading to the fascinating conflict of crematoria staff being arrested for burning zombies – when the zombies themselves have sought them out. There’s a lot of conflict around zombies because they are an apocalyptic force – but they’re also victims with lots of difficult moments like family members being subject to arrest for hiding the fact a relative is a zombie.

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### **R.A. White says**

This book was such a wonderful surprise for me. The intrigue had me gripped, and of course I enjoyed the paranormal nature of it. There's a lot to keep track of, since not only is it a mystery, but there are two worlds and any number of non-humans to recall. So if you're looking for an easy read, this isn't the book for you, but if you're in the mood for schemes, magic, solid characters, and twists, have at it!

The writing was engaging and well done. There was just the right amount of description, and everything felt very real. The author must have spent a lot of time making sure that she had a grip on how everything in the world would work, from how things would smell to how one would feel after coming back from the dead. I can't say much about typos and things like that because it's written in England with their grammar and spelling, so I'm not always sure what might be an error and what might be a simple difference of rules. I admit that at times the difference did throw me, but I just held on and enjoyed the ride. The ONLY complaint I had is that it ends on kind of a cliff hanger. The main story is more or less wound up, but there's still a very big sort of side issue that needs to be resolved. Lucky for us, book two is now available! Since book one is free (as of this posting, and also back when I downloaded it), I have no qualms about spending \$4.99 on the continuation.

My favorite (other) thing about The Secret Dead is that our heroine is a Hag. She's not pretty. In so many books, the girl doesn't think she's pretty, but of course ever man she walks by thinks she's the most amazing 'thing' he's ever seen. We've had enough of that, ladies and gentlemen. This Hag is truly not pretty, but she cares about people, she uses her brain, and she's making the world a better place. I love it! Plus, she can die and come back repeatedly. Tell me that's not cool.

**Sexual Content:** There's a character who's crass, but he doesn't have much face time and we're not supposed to like him anyway.

**Language:** I forgot to take notes, but I'll just say that I don't remember any bad language. There were probably a few minor instances.

**Violence:** We have zombies, murder, and the underworld. So yeah, some violence, but I wouldn't say it's really graphic.

**Overall Plot/Message:** Wonderful mystery entrenched in an urban fantasy London, with a fantastic lead character who lives a life of service and adventure. 5 stars.

Rawhitebooksandmoredotweeblydotcome.

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### **Aditi says**

After so many chick-lits, a paranormal novel really sounds so refreshing!

#### **All thanks to the author, S.W.Fairbrother for providing me with a copy in exchange for an honest review.**

This is about Vivia, a death hag living in the modern London, who has the ability to die to visit the 'other-side' or rather say underworld, and then return to her present form (How cool that sounds!) She's on a roll to save the world when she finds out that her nosy colleague, Malcolm has turned into a zombie, and eventually Malcolm's son goes missing. Vivia works for a very minimal wage and simultaneously she supports her own family (sounds like some everyday crisis!!)

The author has managed to make this book pretty interesting, filled with strange, colorful and highly imaginative characters like boys who can fly, zombies with their very own police procedural and many other such amazing characters which is definitely the USP of the book. Read it to find it out by yourself.

This book deserves a 5star rating for the author's imaginations. These imaginations are quite unlikely very relatable to the readers. The narration of the whole novel is very beautiful, meaning won't drag you even for a single second. Grab this eBook to get a slice of this paranormal world!!

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### **Mel says**

#### **Quite an interesting reading**

I took me a moment before I started to enjoy the storyline. And I was surprised to find actually a character who is not a beauty, like Vivia. It makes the story quite unique. I never read a storyline like this one. There are quite a lot of characters, so you need to stay focused that you understand what's going on.

The Author gives a good detailed description on the creatures as well for the construction in a world of none humans. They have their own politics and laws. The storyline is well written with lot's of information. I liked the characters , speech and the monologues and some even seems to have a nice side but most of the characters are quite cold, or better it lacked on details when a person like Annie cried, they were no emotional descriptions to it. I would have liked more emphasis on the emotional part for some characters like for Vivia, she and her sister had not great childhood, sure she suffered from it, but you can't feel it when she thinks about it. I guess the only person who showed emotions is Malcolm. And I felt sorry for him. The funny part was Viv's sister Sigrid, I quite liked her. The end was a bit weird. But over a good read.

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### **Bruce Gargoyle says**

Full review at <http://thebookshelfgargoyle.wordpress...> (June 4)

I received a digital copy of this book for review from the author.

### Ten Second Synopsis:

Hag Vivia must unravel the mystery of her zombified colleague before things really get out of hand.

I was pleasantly surprised by the complexity of the mystery that Fairbrother has created here. The story seems to unfold in layers, as Viv discovers new information about people she thought she knew well. Then there's Viv's personal struggles with earning enough money to keep herself, her (immortal) step-father and her disabled sister in housing and food. And underlying this is a very tightly written world that believably incorporates humans, a whole range of non-humans and part-humans, as well as undead humans.

I found the zombie theme a fresh new touch to the more traditional urban fantasy elements and I was surprised that it actually worked really well and gave the story an interesting twist. My favourite thing about the zombie threat in this particular book is that it was given a historical basis – the zombifying virus is one that has been present in the population for generations and therefore societies have developed to manage outbreaks and those that are carriers of it. Because Fairbrother has integrated the zompocalypse theme in a historical way, it doesn't have that over-used vibe that can come across in other novels.

If you enjoy the sort of crime investigation/magicality mash-up in Ben Aaronovitch's novels, this might be a good choice for you. The mystery element is pretty complex, involving lots of different characters and backstories, and the world building is solid and believable. I'm not sure whether Fairbrother plans to turn this into a series, but it was pleasantly satisfying to see an ending that wrapped up the events of the book, but left the characters with some options. There's also plenty of lighter moments sprinkled amongst the death and unsightliness, so really, this book should appeal to a wide group of readers.

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### Sally Balboa says

I received a copy of this book from Librarything in exchange for an honest review. While the cop and murder investigation is not a genre I'm big on, the idea of the paranormal in an otherwise overdone scenario is not something I could resist. It sounds original and it is a well done paranormal/murder mystery novel if you ask me.

The Secret Dead follows the hag Vivia Brisk. Vivia being a hag can go to the Underworld and check out how people died. On the night before Malcom died he called Vivia in the middle of the night but didn't get a chance to tell her what was up. The next day he was dead and a zombie. When trying to get Malcolm out of the house before he could hurt anyone his winged son Ben grabbed him and flew away with him. Now the risk of a zombie apocalypse is at hand, but things could get a lot more complicated than that.

The best part about the novel is the paranormal aspect, there are hags, zombies, fairy's, various people who can shift into specific animals, and I suspect that before this series is over we will be meeting a whole lot more of these not so friendly creature. There are also a lot of trips to the underworld where Viva meets harpies and spirits who don't know they're dead. The author even goes as far as to add bigots in the mix who are against non-humans and there are many fronts who are for certain rights that are taken from people because they pose a danger to society, the main one discussed in the novel is Zombie Rights. It's all a very well rounded part of the book.

The book did not always hold my interest sometimes I would find myself wandering, and checking to see how much of the novel was left. This didn't happen very often however. It happened mostly when Vivia got

into the intricacy's of police work.

Vivia is a very interesting character with an even better past, at least to read about. Her mother is a very old hag who is powerful, the two have a difficult history and when you read the novel you'll find that you don't like her either. Then there is Vivia's sister who's soul is backwards because of Vivia. There's a lot of other things but those were the juiciest tid-bits that I can tell you.

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## Willow says

### **Vivia Brisk is my new favorite UF heroine**

Things to like about Vivia Brisk:

1. She's smart -- someone who actually bothers to come up with a plan before tackling a nest of the undead.
2. She's single -- for once a UF heroine who isn't obsessed with the various numerous love interests that seem practically mandatory.
3. She helps at-risk children. She's not a cop or PI, but something more akin to a social worker.
4. She's also a caregiver for her seriously disabled sister (also known as a God-damned everyday hero).
5. Finally, she's a death hag, one of the coolest ideas I've come across for a non-human protagonist in a long time. Her powers are interesting, well-defined, and very thematic. Vivia Brisk doesn't cast curses or fireballs, or read minds or charm others with her ethereal beauty. She's ugly (comes with the "hag" gig), and she dies. She dies a lot.

This is the urban fantasy heroine that I have searched YEARS for -- someone complex and flawed, as sensible as she is smart. This is no Sookie Stackhouse, Rachel Morgan, or other disappointing female lead. For me, Vivia has the potential to be another Harry Dresden (or at least, good enough to stand on the same shelf with him). And as a huge Dresden fan, I don't say that lightly.

Oh, and the rest of the book is great, too; snappy, sensible murder mystery, and first-rate world-building. The ending was a little rushed, and could be considered a mild cliffhanger, but don't let that stop you from picking this up.

Seriously, go read this now!

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## Jade says

This review also appears on Maude Kip, my review blog.

**Disclaimer:** I received this book from the author in exchange for a review. This does not affect my review and the following is my honest opinion.

I'm not going to beat around the bush with this review: *The Secret Dead* is flat out amazing! Phenomenal even. S.W. Fairbrother has crafted a rich, interesting world over the modern city of London with such skill and talent that it sucks you right in! From the first page I was immersed in a London where street weasels and shifters were everyday and common. Where the police have the supernatural on staff and, while it might

rub a few people the wrong way, they're valued members of the force. The way the paranormal is so artfully woven with the mundane in the London of *The Secret Dead* is incredible. S.W. Fairbrother writes so beautifully and so well that it's hard to believe this is the first in the Vivia Brisk series. Honestly, the storytelling in this book is beyond great!

I was riveted to the page, on the edge and worried for the characters who so easily slipped their way into my heart. Each time I learned another of their secrets I was even more invested and, quite happily so, left wanting to know more. S.W. Fairbrother not only built an immersive, exciting world but populated it with engaging, interesting characters. There's something so believable, so human, about them all (even the ones that aren't quite human) that they really came to life in my mind. I have so many questions and was given just the right amount of answers to leave me hungry for the next book. Which, to me, is the show of a truly remarkable author. If I'm sitting there stunned after finishing a book and my heart twisting in remorse for having finished, I know I've read something great. And I love this book. Seriously I cannot stop talking about it to everyone I meet. I've found one of my new favorite authors and I cannot wait for more! I fear I might be infected after reading this book! I may as well be a zombie from the pages of *The Secret Dead* with the way I'm going to mindlessly shamble about, waiting for the next installment!

If you like exciting paranormal mysteries with a strong, intriguing heroine, this book is for you. If you like paranormal detective work and a world filled with shapeshifters and undead and trolls and so many other fantastical beings, this book is for you. If you like worlds just this side of safe from a zombie apocalypse, this book is for you.

If you have a pulse, this book is for you. It's so amazing I'd be shocked if someone *didn't* like it.

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### **Elena Linville says**

You can find this review and more on my blog

Did I mention that I love discovering new exciting series to read? It makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside, because I know that I still have several more books to spend exploring this new world. *The Secret Dead* is one of those books. It's the first one in the London Bones series and it's a very strong beginning of what promises to be an excellent series.

SW Fairbrother has created a very complex world where the supernatural has coexisted with the "natural" for centuries (or maybe even from the beginning, it's not quite clear). So everybody considers this as a natural order of things, even though conflicts still arise between different factions. There are laws and regulations in place to facilitate interactions between normal people and supernatural people, though some are better enforced than others.

And of course, there is the small matter of the necroambulation virus that turns people into flesh-hungry zombies after they die. 98% of those who contract it (either via a bite from a zombie or via sexual contact, like an STD) die within 24 hours, then they reanimate and unless they keep consuming human flesh, they slowly lose their mind and become nothing but rotting shambling corpses. The other 2% survive and become carriers and live the rest of their lives knowing that they will turn zombie as soon as they die. There is no cure.

What I like about this new take on zombies is that in this world this virus has existed for generations, and

society has tried (and often discarded) several different ways of dealing with it, including burning their newly zombified neighbors in their homes along with all their families. This option was later discarded for being too barbaric. Now the zombies are just thrown into a huge underground pit to rot in the dark, which isn't a much better solution, one might argue...

Anyway, this whole situation creates a wonderfully complex world that I absolutely loved exploring. And I also loved the protagonist because she is so not the typical female heroine that we so often see in this genre. Vivia Brisk is a hag, a death witch who can travel the world of the dead at will. Problem is, her body dies every time she does that, so she comes back to a more or less advanced state of decomposition, depending on how much time she spent in the Underworld. And even without that unfortunate side effect of her abilities, she is no beauty even in the best of days.

But despite of that, she is a very engaging character that I enjoyed following. Despite a rather gloomy family situation and not particularly sunny future prospects, she never feels sorry for herself, never whines or moans or wallows in self-pity. She goes on with her life, trying to do her best with the cards she's been dealt, and I can't help but respect her for that...

My only complaint, and the reason this book got 4 stars instead of 5, is that the ending feels rushed. After a slow and steady build-up of the rest of the book, everything is sort of jammed in the last 20 pages or so. And it ends in a huge cliffhanger. But I didn't even mind the cliffhanger that much because I am getting the next book in the series anyway.

So in case you haven't yet noticed from the glowing review above, yes, I definitely recommend this book. Buy it, read it, enjoy it!

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### **J C Mitchinson says**

An original and well written take on urban fantasy.

Things I liked:

- Loved that Vivia was ugly! Lead females are always pretty if not super beautiful, this was so refreshing to me!
- I liked the realness of dealing with Siggy's personal care
- The Pit: what a great idea, really dark, won't look at Battersea Powerstation in the same way again!
- The originality of the ideas was mixed with familiar elements which made this easy to read but very interesting
- Soul magic, a disturbing idea
- Well written, didn't trip me up, not even once!

Reservations

- None, really. I suppose I could comment that it was quite dark and if you're squeamish, you might struggle with some bits. But I liked these things about it so not really reservations at all.

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## Awesome Indies Reviewers says

At first glimpse, this book is almost a spitting image of any of the Dresden Files, only with a female protagonist. You have a rich urban fantasy setting filled to the brim with weird things passing themselves off as people, you have a mystery involving some sort of supernatural creature (a zombie, as it happens), and you have a main character who is human... but not quite. Our protagonist, like Harry, has extra baggage back at home, enough to keep her almost dirt poor. The character in question is on police retainer but also has a day job, and while Vivia Brisk works for a non-profit in England instead of a wizard PI in Chicago, the book instantly has a very similar mood and tone.

Then the differences begin to set in, and by and large, these differences are interesting and well-handled by the author. Instead of supernatural creatures operating under the radar of normal folk, they're fully integrated into society. Something nasty has happened to New Zealand, the London police have a unit specifically designed to deal with folks who are set to go full-on ravenous flesh-eating zombie (though they appear to have pretty awful aim), a colony of winged people live up near Scotland on a remote island, and there are activist groups for various different creatures persecuted by the mainstream society (though the sheer number of non-humans in the book leaves the reader wondering where all the normal folk are...)

There are werecreatures, skinchangers, winged, zombies, mages, normal humans looking to enhance themselves cybernetically, and a whole host of other cool beings running around London, and then there's Vivia herself: a hag. With the ability to step beyond the veil and into the land of the dead, Vivia is a prime candidate to help the police in their investigations, especially one in which a zombie is airlifted off the scene of the crime by his winged bastard son, and several desiccated bodies are found near the zombie's house.

From here the mystery deepens, until it's impossible to tell exactly what the mystery is, which is where the book takes a turn for the worse: the cast of characters begins to fill to the brim, then overflow. Taking into account that Vivia could find someone's shade in the land of the dead, and that those people have unreal copies of other people in their death-world dreamscapes, and you have a book that is over saturated with characters that are alive, not alive, not real, hiding something, presumed dead, and possibly the bad guy. By around the sixty or seventy percent mark, the cast of characters has grown so large that it's impossible to keep track of them without a notepad or several family trees.

This is really unfortunate, because there's a great writer here, one who has the capacity to keep things moving and keep the readers guessing. Unfortunately, the author is either well ahead of the reader, or isn't actually sure how the book should end. Even at the end, when the finale rushes off to a bizarre and brutal conclusion, I couldn't be sure what the original crime was all about in the first place.

While I will confess to being a lover of urban fantasy, and while Vivia seems like the perfect character to get involved with homocides and supernatural-related crimes, I can't recommend this book as a mystery. Readers are cautioned to have a notebook ready, for clues and genealogies.

AIA's 4 star rating includes books that would probably be picked up by a mainstream publisher, and the writer's smooth transitions and interesting dialogue/characters place it very close to the mark, but the plot itself is bursting at the seams with characters (alive and dead, real and non), so much so that it's impossible to keep track. AIA's 3 star rating is books we'd recommend as a good read, but which might need some work. The Secret Dead falls into the latter category.

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**margaret Lane says****Wonderful!!!**

Loved this read....recommended to friends. Nice change from what I've been reading. I enjoyed this book immensely. Please give it a read!

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**Maggie says**

Sad to say that I did not finish this book. Maybe someday I'll get back to it, but it's not my usual genre.

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