



Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet

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Maire is a baker with an extraordinary gift: she can infuse her treats with emotions and abilities, which are then passed on to those who eat them. She doesn't know why she can do this and remembers nothing of who she is or where she came from.

When marauders raid her town, Maire is captured and sold to the eccentric Allemas, who enslaves her and demands that she produce sinister confections, including a witch's gingerbread cottage, a living cookie boy, and size-altering cakes.

During her captivity, Maire is visited by Fyel, a ghostly being who is reluctant to reveal his connection to her. The more often they meet, the more her memories return, and she begins to piece together who and what she really is—as well as past mistakes that yield cosmic consequences.

From the author of The Paper Magician series comes a haunting and otherworldly tale of folly and consequence, forgiveness and redemption.

Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet Details

Date : Published June 28th 2016 by 47North

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Author : Charlie N. Holmberg

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From Reader Review Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet for online ebook

DeB MaRtEnS says

I received this book via NetGalley, compliments of 47thN Publishers. I had no idea what I was about to read, no familiarity with the author and have been upbeat with my review.

When a book invites me to experience its fantastical magic AND that magic appears in concoctions charmingly baked, I'm hooked on those ingredients before I open the first page.

Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet is that book. The tale opens in Carmine where Maire works for her friend Attrice in the bakery, mixing together spiced, savoury, chocolate, lavender cakes and pastries which award their purchasers with what they might need or seek. Olive oil- someone needs strength; berry tarts- wisdom; cocoa beans and pepper - Mmmmm, the favourite of all, seekers of love.

However, Maire herself is a bit of a mystery. Found bruised and disoriented four years earlier, she had no memories beyond that of her name. She knows that she is not from this place because she resembles no one in skin tone and hair colour but the rustic village accepts her and Cleric Tuck is showing keen interest in her too.,

Suddenly their peace is murderously interrupted by a gang of attackers, killing and looting and taking prisoners. Maire and Tuck are assaulted when they refuse to be compliant but are chained; they are to be sold as slaves.

Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet takes a dramatic, dark and very grim twist at this point in the novel. Maire is bought by Allemas, a bizarre looking man with bluish ,wild red hair, chartreuse eyes and long uncoordinated limbs. "You, you!" he says, "I knooooow you!" She does not know him...but there is something familiar... He commands her to bake; she thinks of mercy. After a mouthful of cake, he throws the plate to the floor. "I do not FEEL this way." Allemas is mercurial and merciless. Maire will make money for him baking cakes for his clients while he keeps her captive. The reader is transported to scenes evocative of familiar fairy tales as they travel to these projects; Maire bakes gingerbread to cover a house and Allemas comments that he feels sorry for the children, after she wonders who will eat it. She is jailed in a cellar, wears a cuff and chain around her ankle.

In the midst of her hopelessness, Maire has visitations from a winged apparition, Fyel. As Allemas grows increasingly more violent, Maire begins to access past memories with Fyel and finds an important crystal. In order to find her memories, to be free of Allemas and return to her own home, Maire must find the second crystal. She must know her story; why she is able to craft cakes with intention but not her own life.

This little novel has a great deal of sparkle, huge imagination behind its fantasy world and is a heartfelt concoction from author Charlie N. Holmberg. With many, many overlapping strands, and thus subplots, the tension of Maire's search for answers somewhat flattened the excitement unfortunately. Holmberg descriptions of her settings are marvellous, and perhaps her greatest strength. As well, anywhere that Maire baked and thought through the process were almost palpable scenes, redolent of aromas, sensual with hands in dough and lips on batter; happily, for me, she baked often. Along my way through this book, I found myself in the company of villages akin to those of the treasured Hobbits, from the novel and reminded of their quest which was a turtle-paced affair. Allemas stood in my mind as a shockingly coloured Straw Man from Oz (another quest) but whose truncated sentences became babbling of a Gollum-like thing. I think that if Charlie Holmberg managed to trigger these shadows of such classic characters for me in her novel's magical quest, she impacted my imagination a great deal. 3.5 stars

(I would classify this novel as New Adult/Young Adult. I think it would have a great deal of appeal for young women in these groups.)

Barbara (The Bibliophage) says

I received a copy of this book from NetGalley and 47North in exchange for an honest review. Many thanks to both!

I stopped reading this book at 41%, and was tempted to stop a few times earlier. I had been attracted to it because I'd heard good things about The Paper Magician by the same author. It was listed as fantasy and adult fiction, but for me it was more of a YA read.

My biggest frustration is the author's continued "description" of people, places, and feelings as indescribable or impossible to describe. To me, this is an author and editor cop out. The whole point of writing a book is to describe the characters' experience, no matter how different that is from our world here on Earth.

Speaking of worlds, this book's world-building was weak. I wasn't fascinated by the setting because it didn't have enough detailed descriptions. For example, marauders are described only as marauders. We don't know how they dressed, how they looked, or other details. They are primarily referred to with that one word - marauder. Get this author a thesaurus.

Also, the characterization were stilted and shallow. We had a heroine, a villain, a love interest, and a mystery. Each character was as flat and uninteresting as the next.

I had high hopes for this book, and am terribly disappointed.

Susana says

Arc Provided by 47 North through Netgalley

Book Status: Already Released (June 28th)

I'm afraid that the only positive remark I can write about this story (without revealing the WHOLE PLOT)... is that it didn't make me want to set it on fire. -_-

In the same state of mind, I have to mention that it never pissed me off... much.

No, wait there was that time in which the character... you know what? Never mind.

Truth is, I found it incredibly boring and many were the times in which I almost DNF it.

The beginning, and really, I am talking about the very first pages weren't bad: I like a mystery just like every one else, but then things got so strange in a, "~~oh, here's a few crumbs of different colours and textures, and I know that nothing makes sense, but you'll keep on reading, right?~~", meaning that I only reached the last page by pure stubbornness. When I want, I can be the queen of stubborn people.

There were no tangible facts: no world building. There was also a strange mish mash of stories, and

concepts, to which I never warmed up to.

The characters, with the exception of Maeve, were pretty forgetful, and the whole abstract feel of the story, didn't help the matter.

The romance was dealt in a pretty meh way, especially for people who are supposed to be... who they are.

Yes, I am being vague on purpose.

In the end, when I found out about why our character had done what she did _ ??? _ was when I got a little pissed off, because I felt that different concepts had been completely mixed (human and not so human)...

and I don't know how to be more clear without spoiling the whole thing. But I felt that I was being somewhat preached (as a woman) and I had a huge problem with that.

Not for me, I'm afraid: for me, strange does not a book make.

And here it is: a confusing book review for a strange story concept.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 3.5* of five

MAGIC BITTER, MAGIC SWEET is an unusual fantasy novel, but not for the usual reasons. 47North did a great job on Charlie N. Holmberg's stand-alone fantasy novel.

My review is live at Expendable Mudge Muses Aloud, better known as "my blog."

Inge says

I really, really wanted to like this book. I requested it because it had received pretty good reviews from my friends, and also because the story started with cake. It's basically about a woman who bakes magical cake. I mean, how awesome does that sound?

However, I often thought about not finishing it. In the end, it was a pretty quick read and the ending was rather cool, but I don't think it was worth getting through the entire book. Information was withheld on purpose and created annoyance rather than suspense. Nothing really happened for a long time. I didn't particularly care about any of the characters, and others were annoying or confusing.

Overall, while the beginning was quite intriguing, the book failed to keep my interest.

Thank you NetGalley / 47North for providing me with a copy

Dominique says

This ARC was provided by the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

This is an amazing story. It's very well written, the plot is creative and the characters are greatly described. I loved Maire and her magic. While I was reading, I really needed to know where she came from and what happened to her. I liked the mix of this story with a few fairytale elements. And the ending was perfect <3

Those with a taste for the olive oil cake crave strength, while those who come back for the berry tarts are, unknowingly, seeking wisdom.

Although this story is a very sweet story, it is also a bitter one. A big part of this book deals with some heavy themes and therefore it wouldn't be appropriate for children.

★★★★★: I enjoyed this story very much and I will definitely get my hands on a copy when it's published. I recommend it to everyone who is in love with magic. The cover is also stunning!

Maria V. Snyder says

I really liked the way the magic worked in this book. The main character Maire bakes pastries and she can infuse her creations with feelings like love and contentment. The plot is also different and if you liked Charlie's other books, you'll enjoy this one as well.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

Final review, first posted on Fantasy Literature:

Maire, a baker in the small village of Carmine, is notable for two unusual characteristics. First, other than her name, she has complete amnesia about everything in her life up to the time she appeared near the village four and a half years ago. And secondly, Maire has the magical gift of infusing her baked goods with feelings and abilities that will be absorbed by the person who eats her food: strength, love, mercy, patience ... even, it seems, some magical abilities.

One day a pale, translucent man, with strange wings that look more like sunlit water than feathers, appears and talks to Maire briefly. He orders her to run for her life, but it's too late: marauders on horseback are storming the village and killing or capturing everyone in sight. Maire is taken and soon sold as a slave to a very odd and sinister man, Allemas, who finds out about her magical cooking abilities. He makes several strange demands of her ? for example, make a life-sized gingerbread house in the woods for a customer ? in between mistreating and neglecting her. Allemas changes his name several times during the course of this tale, indicative of his inconsistent and broken nature.

The only thing that comforts Maire (though it frustrates her as well) is the occasional visits of Fyel, the winged man who appeared to her earlier. Fyel knows Maire's past but is afraid to share more information with her, concerned that if he tells her before she is ready to wholly believe what he says, she will be "lost." But Fyel's visits are gradually starting to open a crack in her memories and even changing Maire physically.

There is a whole other world of spells and sorcery coexisting with my own. Alger knows it. This woman in the woods knows it. I believe, somehow, that Fyel knows it. I am completely ignorant about this hidden realm, but when I bake, I scrape my nails beneath its door.

Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet is itself an unusual confection, where there are fanciful details, such as Maire's angel-like visitor, the delightful bakery foods steeped in magic, and fairy tale references, mixed together with the bitter, painful life of a slave. There are some cruel and brutal events related to Maire's slavery (not, however, including any sexual violence against Maire) that may be difficult reading for young or sensitive readers.

The pace is, for the most part, rather slow and contemplative. Told in first person present tense, most of the time is spent with Maire in a state of confused frustration, cudgeling her brain to try to remember who she is, and attempting to figure out a way to escape from Allemas. Several clues foreshadow the big reveal at the end, so it wasn't really a surprise for me, though some of the pertinent details were. Fittingly, it was both bitter and sweet.

The plot relies a bit too heavily on coincidence for a few key developments in the story, such as Allemas finding Maire and being able to purchase her as a slave, and Maire finding a certain crystal in an entirely random place. The world-building is a bit thin as well; this land is a rather typical medieval-level society, not given a lot of depth or detail. Charlie N. Holmberg does, however, weave in some significant themes in *Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet*. Ideas and thoughts regarding the paths we choose to follow in pursuing our desires, the mistakes we make and the consequences we bear as a result of our choices, whether ultimately for good or ill ? bitter or sweet, or both ? add resonance to this mythical and, in the end, rather spiritual story.

Initial thoughts:

This new fantasy novel, just released at the end of June 2016, is one that will appeal to readers who enjoy angel types of beings in their fantasies.

The pace of *Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet* is a bit slow at times. I'm not sure if it's a YA novel, but personally I'd put it in that category, though there are some parts involving Maire's slavery that may be difficult reading for some readers. I did like the way a few fairy tale threads were woven into this novel. The big reveal at the end wasn't totally a surprise, though some of the key details were.

I received a free copy of this ebook from NetGalley and the publisher in exchange for a review. Thanks!

Kimberly VanderHorst says

I went into reading this book with only the vaguest idea of what it was about. Magical baked goods? Sounded like my kind of story. Whimsical, unusual, and compelling? Bring it on. And *Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet* definitely delivered all the above and more. What caught me off guard was the level of emotion I felt as I read. This book rubbed me raw in beautiful ways. I've read all of Holmberg's other books and despite already being at a high level, she leveled up with this one.

I CRIED, people. I actually cried. And this is NOT a normal thing for me.

Not only is the story beautifully crafted and the world-building exquisite, the emotional authenticity was so powerful that while I immediately wanted to read the book again once I finished, I needed to recuperate for a few days before I could tackle it again. THAT is how you earn five stars. Wow.

Highly recommend this read to anyone who loves magic, moving stories, and surprise endings that take your breath away (literally--I gasped, and I'm the person who ALWAYS guesses the ending).

Cheri says

I vacillated for at least the 1st third of this about abandoning it, toward the end of the 2nd third it began to improve, however I don't feel it ever achieved anything above a rating of "okay."

The premise of this story is a bit of a mix between something like “Like Water for Chocolate,” with something maybe like “Heaven Can Wait,” (book by Leonore Fleischer, although I only saw the movie), with a healthy dash of evil. Having said that, it’s only part of the premise of the first two books that is, in part, the premise of this story.

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Many thanks to 47North – an imprint of Amazon Publishing, NetGalley and author Charlie N. Holmberg for providing me with an advanced copy for reading and review

Evelina | AvalinahsBooks says

This book might be a little glum, but it goes so well with cocoa and a warm blanket. Why? A non-comprehensive list:

- ★ cake
- ★ more cake
- ★ ...so the book is primarily dedicated to cake
- ★ love
- ★ mystery
- ★ fairytales
- ★ magic (*cake magic..?*)

All of this goes with cocoa for me. Granted, the main heroine suffers more than enjoys herself in her journey through this story, but it's well worth it, in my eyes. It's written beautifully, and it keeps its mystery throughout pretty much all of the book, as the main characters suffer from amnesia, ***so you don't really get to find out what happens, before... you do. Which is... Right at the end.*** I've heard of people struggling with this bit, but I didn't – ***to me, this book was an intricately woven canvas of emotions,*** all colorful, and all imbued with taste, particularly expressed through different kinds of confectioneries the main character concocts. ***And the frosting on top?*** Hints of fairytales are interspersed through the story, all connected through magic and... cake. What's not to love?

This book appears in the list of ***Books To Go With Cocoa And A Warm Blanket.*** Check out the others!

Read Post On My Blog | My Bookstagram | Bookish Twitter

rachel • typed truths says

3.5 stars - *Review copy provided by the publisher for an honest review.*

This is one of the most difficult reviews I’ve ever had to write. Have you ever read a book that you loved but was also so different and strange and *peculiar* that you aren’t actually sure whether you did enjoy it or not? No? Well, damn because that’s what I feel about this book and I am struggling so much to translate my tangle of emotions to the screen.

There is definitely something undeniably addictive and downright gorgeous about Holmberg’s writing. It always manages to draw me in, and keep me reading. It’s subtle but poetic and completely enthralling. If we

just singled out the writing aspect of this story, I'd have no problems giving this book five stars.

The plot also had an addictive quality to it too. The first 40% (or so) was unputdownable. I fell into this story without meaning to it, and boy, did it suck me in quickly or what. I was up late, flipping through the pages with ease, desperate to see where the story was heading. It was unlike anything I'd ever read before, and I had no idea where the story was heading or even where it could possibly go. If you know me, you know that predictability is a massive no-no for me so the fact that Holmberg left me no clues whatsoever, and that I *had* to keep reading if I wanted to find out more was perfect.

But the more the story went on, the less I felt that urgency to read more. The story started to peter out - so slowly at first that I honestly didn't even realise. Yet the more and more I read, the more and more I was getting... sidetracked? Probably not the most accurate description, but I felt that the story had lost its momentum. The plot was getting a little stranger and stranger. The characters lost their oomph, the villain became... useless and dull, not doing anything. The story just felt like it'd taken a wrong turn, and was too far in to turn back. It hit a snag, and I didn't like it. Then *bam* - we were hit with the ending/major plot twist thing and... gah, I don't know what to think of it. I think I liked it? Or maybe just the idea of it? It worked, and it didn't. It was unique, and explained everything... but I don't know if I'm 100% satisfied with it and now I'm lost.

Can you see why I'm struggling to write this review now?

Let's just break this down:

Writing? Check. Beautiful. Gorgeous. Enchanting. Similar adjectives.

Plot? Hmm, it was mostly good...

Characters? Spot on... until they weren't?

Pacing? Perfect... at first.

Romance? Great tension but mostly confusing.

Magic? BRILLIANT. CAN I GO FOR LENGTHS AT A TIME HOW BRILLIANT THIS MAGICAL BAKING THING WAS. GENIUS!

Ending? Uh.... I don't know.

... so that's it.

Overall? I loved this story. I think. The writing and magical system was perfect. The characters and plot were perfect for the first 40%... and almost everything slowly petered out after that, unfortunately. I'll still be reading everything this author put out. I loved her writing style, but I don't know what to think of this book.

Eve Recinella (Between The Bookends) says

ARC provided by NetGalley in exchange for an honest review

Two things, ONE...this book made me REALLY hungry for cake. TWO, that cover is really awesome.

I enjoyed this one, but it didn't WOW me. The writing is gorgeous, no doubt about that. It's whimsical and fairytale like and It started off great, but then I found myself losing interest halfway through and struggling to finish it. The story just seemed to peter out and take a strange turn and I didn't really like the direction it went in.

Overall this had beautiful writing, and I enjoyed the first half of the book a lot and it was a solid 4 stars. Unfortunately the last half lost me and was only a generous 2 stars.

Robyn says

A very prettily written book, with many clever allusions. However, I just did not enjoy the plot as much as I hoped I would. I have a hard time with stories like this, that withhold everything from the reader until the main character herself discovers the truth - it has to be very well done indeed, and with a good payoff.

❀Aimee❀ Just one more page... says

Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet surprised me.

I expected a mere fairy tale about a girl that could infuse her baked goods with emotions for those that eat them. Instead I found a deeply complex story that wasn't afraid to go dark in order to get to the light.

Maire doesn't remember who she is but has made herself a new life in a small village with new friends. When their village is attacked, she sees many die brutally and is among many sold as slaves.

While Maire tries to come to grips with her new cruel reality, she is occasionally visited by someone ephemeral and *familiar* in some way. He helps guide her gently through her returning memories so that she will be strong enough to understand the whole picture.

Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet book pulled me in, turned me inside out, broke me, and healed me along with Maire.

Thank you Netgalley for a free digital copy in exchange for an honest review.
