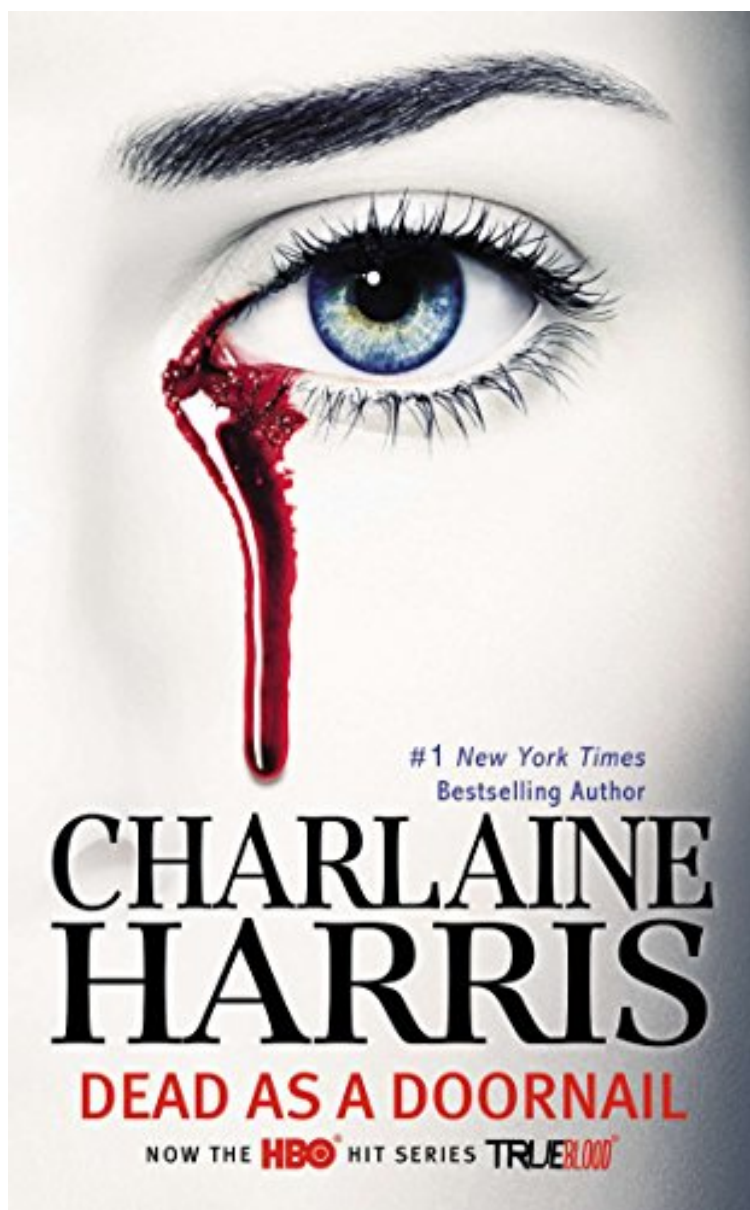


[Read now] File size: 78.Mb

Dead as a Doornail



Par Charlaine Harris
**Download PDF | ePub | DOC | audiobook | ebooks*

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #183944 dans eBooksPubli le: 2006-04-25Sorti le: 2006-04-25Format: Ebook Kindle

[Read now] Dead as a Doornail

Par Charlaine Harris : Dead as a Doornail before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dead as a Doornail:

Download

Read Online

Description : Description du produitWhen Sookie's brother Jason's eyes start to change, she knows he's about to turn into a were-panther for the first time. But her concern becomes cold fear when a sniper sets his deadly sights on the local changeling population-and Jason's new panther brethren suspect he may be the shooter. Now, Sookie has until the next full moon to find out who's behind the attacks, unless the killer decides to find her first.

Prsentation de l'diteurSmall town cocktail waitress Sookie Stackhouses supernatural existence puts her in the line of fire in the fifth novel in the #1 New York Times bestselling series.When Sookie Stackhouse sees her brother Jasons eyes start to change, she knows hes about to turn into a were-panther for the first time. But

her concern becomes cold fear when a sniper sets his deadly sights on the local changeling population, and Jason's new panther brethren suspect he may be the shooter. Now, Sookie has until the next full moon to find out who's behind the attacks unless the killer decides to find her first... Extrait I knew my brother would turn into a panther before he did. As I drove to the remote crossroads community of Hotshot, my brother watched the sunset in silence. Jason was dressed in old clothes, and he had a plastic Wal-Mart bag containing a few things he might need: toothbrush, clean underwear. He hunched inside his bulky camo jacket, looking straight ahead. His face was tense with the need to control his fear and his excitement. You got your cell phone in your pocket? I asked, knowing I'd already asked him as soon as the words left my mouth. But Jason just nodded instead of snapping at me. It was still afternoon, but at the end of January the dark comes early. Tonight would be the first full moon of the New Year. When I stopped the car, Jason turned to look at me, and even in the dim light I saw the change in his eyes. They weren't blue like mine anymore. They were yellowish. The shape of them had changed. My face feels funny, he said. But he still hadn't put two and two together. Tiny Hotshot was silent and still in the waning light. A cold wind was blowing across the bare fields, and the pines and oaks were shivering in the gusts of frigid air. Only one man was visible. He was standing outside one of the little houses, the one that was freshly painted. This man's eyes were closed, and his bearded face was raised to the darkening sky. Calvin Norris waited until Jason was climbing out the passenger's door of my old Nova before he walked over and bent to my window. I rolled it down. His golden-green eyes were as startling as I'd remembered, and the rest of him was just as unremarkable. Stocky, graying, sturdy, he looked like a hundred other men I'd seen in Merlotte's Bar, except for those eyes. I'll take good care of him, Calvin Norris said. Behind him, Jason stood with his back to me. The air around my brother had a peculiar quality; it seemed to be vibrating. None of this was Calvin Norris's fault. He hadn't been the one who'd bitten my brother and changed him forever. Calvin, a werepanther, had been born what he was; it was his nature. I made myself say, Thank you. I'll bring him home in the morning. To my house, please. His truck is at my place. All right, then. Have a good night. He raised his face to the wind again, and I felt the whole community was waiting, behind their windows and doors, for me to leave. So I did. Jason knocked on my door at seven the next morning. He still had his little Wal-Mart bag, but he hadn't used anything in it. His face was bruised, and his hands were covered with scratches. He didn't say a word. He just stared at me when I asked him how he was, and walked past me through the living room and down the hall. He closed the door to the hall bathroom with a decisive click. I heard the water running after a second, and I heaved a weary sigh all to myself. Though I'd gone to work and come home tired at about two a.m., I hadn't gotten much sleep. By the time Jason emerged, I'd fixed him some bacon and eggs. He sat down at the old kitchen table with an air of pleasure: a man doing a familiar and pleasant thing. But after a second of staring down at the plate, he leaped to his feet and ran back into the bathroom, kicking the door shut behind him. I listened to him throw up, over and over. I stood outside the door helplessly, knowing he wouldn't want me to come in. After a moment, I went back to the kitchen to dump the food into the trash can, ashamed of the waste but utterly unable to force myself to eat. When Jason returned, he said only, Coffee? He looked green around the gills, and he walked like he was sore. Are you okay? I asked, not sure if he would be able to answer or not. I poured the coffee into a mug. Yes, he said after a moment, as though he'd had to think about it. That was the most incredible experience of my life. For a second, I thought he meant throwing up in my bathroom, but that was sure no new experience for Jason. He'd been quite a drinker in his teens, until he'd figured out that there was nothing glamorous or attractive about hanging over a toilet bowl, heaving your guts out. Shifting, I said tentatively. He nodded, cradling his coffee mug in his hands. He held his face over the steam rising from the hot, strong blackness. He met my eyes. His own were once again their ordinary blue. It's the most incredible rush, he said. Since I was bitten, not born, I don't get to be a true panther like the others. I could hear envy in his voice. But even what I become is amazing. You feel the magic inside you, and you feel your bones moving around and adapting, and your vision changes. Then you're lower to the ground and you walk in a whole different way, and as for running, damn, you can run. You can chase. . . . And his voice died away. I would just as soon not know that part, anyway. So it's not so bad? I asked, my hands clasped together. Jason was all the family I had, except for a cousin who'd drifted away into the underworld of drugs years before. It's not so bad, Jason agreed, scraping up a smile to give me. It's great while you're actually the animal. Everything's so simple. It's when you're back to being human that you start to worry about stuff. He wasn't suicidal. He wasn't even despondent. I wasn't aware I'd been holding my breath until I let it out. Jason was going to be able to live with the hand he'd been dealt. He was going to be okay. The relief was incredible, like I'd removed something jammed painfully between my teeth or shaken a

sharp rock out of my shoe. For days, weeks even, I'd been worried, and now that anxiety was gone. That didn't mean Jason's life as a shape-shifter would be worry-free, at least from my point of view. If he married a regular human woman, their kids would be normal. But if he married into the shifter community at Hotshot, I'd have nieces or nephews who turned into animals once a month. At least, they would after puberty; that would give them, and their auntie Sook, some preparation time. Luckily for Jason, he had plenty of vacation days, so he wasn't due at the parish road department. But I had to work tonight. As soon as Jason left in his flashy pickup truck, I crawled back into bed, jeans and all, and in about five minutes I was fast asleep. The relief acted as a kind of sedative. When I woke up, it was nearly three o'clock and time for me to get ready for my shift at Merlottes. The sun outside was bright and clear, and the temperature was fifty-two, said my indoor-outdoor thermometer. This isn't too unusual in north Louisiana in January. The temperature would drop after the sun went down, and Jason would shift. But he'd have some fur not a full coat, since he turned into half-man, half-cat and he'd be with other panthers. They'd go hunting. The woods around Hotshot, which lay in a remote corner of Renard Parish, would be dangerous again tonight. As I went about eating, showering, folding laundry, I thought of a dozen things I'd like to know. I wondered if the shifters would kill a human being if they came upon one in the woods. I wondered how much of their human consciousness they retained in their animal form. If they mated in panther form, would they have a kitten or a baby? What happened when a pregnant werepanther saw the full moon? I wondered if Jason knew the answer to all these questions yet, if Calvin had given him some kind of briefing. But I was glad I hadn't questioned Jason this morning while everything was still so new to him. I'd have plenty of chances to ask him later. For the first time since New Year's Day, I was thinking about the future. The full moon symbol on my calendar no longer seemed to be a period marking the end of something, but just another way of counting time. As I pulled on my waitress outfit (black pants and a white boat-neck T-shirt and black Reeboks), I felt almost giddy with cheer. For once, I left my hair down instead of pulling it back and up into a ponytail. I put in some bright red dot earrings and matched my lipstick to the color. A little eye makeup and some blush, and I was good to go. I'd parked at the rear of the house last night, and I checked the back porch carefully to make sure there weren't any lurking vampires before I shut and locked the back door behind me. I'd been surprised before, and it wasn't a pleasant feeling. Though it was barely dark, there might be some early risers around. Probably the last thing the Japanese had expected when they'd developed synthetic blood was that its availability would bring vampires out of the realm of legend and into the light of fact. The Japanese had just been trying to make a few bucks hawking the blood substitute to ambulance companies and hospital emergency rooms. Instead, the way we looked at the world had changed forever. Speaking of vampires (if only to myself), I wondered if Bill Compton was home. Vampire Bill had been my first love, and he lived right across the cemetery from me. Our houses lay on a parish road outside the little town of Bon Temps and south of the bar where I worked. Lately, Bill had been traveling a lot. I only found out he was home if he happened to come into Merlottes, which he did every now and then to mix with the natives and have some warm O-positive. He preferred TrueBlood, the most expensive Japanese synthetic. He'd told me it almost completely satisfied his cravings for blood fresh from the source. Since I'd witnessed Bill going into a bloodlust fit, I could only thank God for TrueBlood. Sometimes I missed Bill an awful lot. I gave myself a mental shake. Snapping out of a slump, that was what today was all about. No more worry! No more fear! Free and twenty-six! Working! House paid for! Money in the bank! These were all good, positive things. The parking lot was full when I got to the bar. I could see I'd be busy tonight. I drove around back to the employees' entrance. Sam Merlotte, the owner and my boss, lived back there in a very nice double-wide that even had a little yard surrounded by a hedge, Sam's equivalent of a white picket fence. I locked my car and went in the employees' back door, which opened into the hallway off of which lay the men's and the ladies, a large stock room, and Sam's office. I stowed my purse and coat in an empty desk drawer, pulled up my red socks, shook my head to make my hair hang right, and went through the doorway (this door was almost always propped open) that led to the big room of the bar/restaurant. Not that the kitchen produced anything but the most basic stuff: hamburgers, chicken strips, fries and onion rings, salads in the summer and chili in the winter. Sam was the bartender, the bouncer, and on occasion the cook, but lately we'd been lucky in getting our positions filled: Sam's seasonal allergies had hit hard, making him less than ideal as a food handler. The new cook had shown up in answer to Sam's ad just the week before. Cooks didn't seem to stay long at Merlottes, but I was hoping that Sweetie Des Arts would stick around a while. She showed up on time, did her job well, and never gave the rest of the staff any trouble. Really, that was all you could ask for. Our last cook, a guy, had given my friend Arlene a big rush of hope that he was The One in this case, he'd have been her fourth or fifth

Onebefore hed decamped overnight with her plates and forks and a CD player. Her kids had been devastated; not because theyd loved the guy, but because they missed their CD player. I walked into a wall of noise and cigarette smoke that made it seem like I was passing into another universe. Smokers all sit on the west side of the room, but the smoke doesnt seem to know it should stay there. I put a smile on my face and stepped behind the bar to give Sam a pat on the arm. After he expertly filled a glass with beer and slid it to a patron, he put another glass under the tap and began the process all over again. How are things? Sam asked carefully. He knew all about Jasons problems, since hed been with me the night Id found Jason being held prisoner in a toolshed in Hotshot. But we had to be roundabout in our speech; vampires had gone public, but shape-shifters and Weres were still cloaked in secrecy. The underground world of supernatural beings was waiting to see how vampires fared before they followed the vampire example by going public. Better than I expected. I smiled up at him, though not too far up, since Sams not a big man. Hes built lean, but hes much stronger than he looks. Sam is in his thirties at least, I think he is and he has reddish gold hair that halos his head. Hes a good man, and a great boss. Hes also a shape-shifter, so he can change into any animal. Most often, Sam turns into a very cute collie with a gorgeous coat. Sometimes he comes over to my place and I let him sleep on the rug in the living room. Hes gonna be fine. Im glad, he said. I cant read shifter minds as easily as I read human minds, but I can tell if a mood is true or not. Sam was happy because I was happy. When are you taking off? I asked. He had that faraway look in his eyes, the look that said he was mentally running through the woods, tracking possums. As soon as Terry gets here. He smiled at me again, but this time the smile was a bit strained. Sam was getting antsy. The door to the kitchen was just outside the bar area at the west end, and I stuck my head in the door to say hi to Sweetie. Sweetie was bony and brunette and fortyish, and she wore a lot of makeup for someone who was going to be out of sight in the kitchen all evening. She also seemed a little sharper, perhaps better educated, than any of Merlottes previous short-order cooks. You doing okay, Sookie? she called, flipping a hamburger as she spoke. Sweetie was in constant motion in the kitchen, and she didnt like anyone getting in her way. The teenager who assisted her and bussed tables was terrified of Sweetie, and he took care to dodge her as she moved from griddle to fryer. This teenage boy got the plates ready, made the salads, and went to the window to tell the barmaids which order was up. Out on the floor, Holly Cleary and her best friend, Danielle, were working hard. Theyd both looked relieved when theyd seen me come in. Danielle worked the smoking section to the west, Holly usually worked the middle area in front of the bar, and I worked the east when three of us were on duty. It looks like I better get moving, I told Sweetie. She gave me a quick smile and turned back to the griddle. The cowed teenager, whose name I had yet to catch, gave me a ducked-head nod and went back to loading the dishwasher. I wished Sam had called me before things had gotten so busy; I wouldnt have minded coming in a little earlier. Of course, he wasnt exactly himself tonight. I began checking the tables in my section, getting fresh drinks and clearing off food baskets, collecting money and bringing change. Barmaid! Bring me a Red Stuff! The voice was unfamiliar, and the order was unusual. Red Stuff was the cheapest artificial blood, and only the newest vampires would be caught dead asking for it. I got a bottle from the clear-fronted refrigerator and stuck it in the microwave. While it warmed, I scanned the crowd for the vamp. He was sitting with my friend Tara Thornton. Id never seen him before, which was worrisome. Tara had been dating an older vampire (much older: Franklin Mott had been older than Tara in human years before he died, and hed been a vampire for over three hundred years), and hed been giving her lavish gifts like a Camaro. What was she doing with this new guy? At least Franklin had nice manners. I put the warm bottle on a tray and carried it over to the couple. The lighting in Merlottes at night isnt particularly bright, which is how patrons like it, and it wasnt until Id gotten quite near that I could appreciate Taras companion. He was slim and narrow shouldered with slicked-back hair. He had long fingernails and a sharp face. I supposed that, in a way, he was attractive if you like a liberal dose of danger with your sex. I put the bottle down in front of him and glanced uncertainly at Tara. She looked great, as usual. Tara is tall, slim, and dark haired, and she has a wardrobe of wonderful clothes. Shed overcome a truly horrible childhood to own her own business and actually join the chamber of commerce. Then she started dating the wealthy vampire, Franklin Mott, and she quit sharing her life with me. Sookie, she said, I want you to meet Franklins friend Mickey. She didnt sound like she wanted us to meet. She sounded like she wished Id never come over with Miceys drink. Her own glass was almost empty, but she said, No, when I asked her if she was ready for another. I exchanged a nod with the vampire; they dont shake hands, not normally. He was watching me as he took a gulp from the bottled blood, his eyes as cold and hostile as a snakes. If he was a friend of the ultra-urbane Franklin, I was a silk purse. Hired hand, more like. Maybe a bodyguard? Why would Franklin give Tara a bodyguard? She

obviously wasn't going to talk openly in front of this slimeball, so I said, Catch you later, and took Mickey's money to the till. I was busy all night, but in the spare moments I had, I thought about my brother. For a second night, he was out frolicking under the moon with the other beasties. Sam had taken off like a shot the moment Terry Bellefleur arrived, though his office wastebasket was full of crumpled tissues. His face had been tense with anticipation. It was one of those nights that made me wonder how the humans around me could be so oblivious to the other world operating right beside ours. Only willful ignorance could ignore the charge of magic in the air. Only a group lack of imagination could account for people not wondering what went on in the dark around them. But not too long ago, I reminded myself, I'd been as willfully blind as any of the crowd in Merlottes. Even when the vampires had made their carefully coordinated worldwide announcement that their existence was fact, few authorities or citizens seemed to take the next mental step: If vampires exist, what else could be lurking just outside the edge of the light? Out of curiosity, I began to dip into the brains around me, testing to see their fears. Most of the people in the bar were thinking about Mickey. The women, and some of the men, were wondering what it would be like to be with him. Even stick-in-the-mud lawyer Portia Bellefleur was peeking around her conservative beau to study Mickey. I could only wonder at these speculations. Mickey was terrifying. That negated any physical attraction I might have felt toward him. But I had lots of evidence that the other humans in the bar didn't feel the same way. I've been able to read minds all my life. The ability is no great gift. Most people's minds don't bear reading. Their thoughts are boring, disgusting, disillusioning, but very seldom amusing. At least Bill had helped me learn how to cut out some of the buzz. Before he'd given me some clues, it had been like tuning in to a hundred radio stations simultaneously. Some of them had come in crystal clear, some had been remote, and some, like the thoughts of shape-shifters, had been full of static and obscurity. But they'd all added up to cacophony. No wonder lots of people had treated me as a half-wit. Vampires were silent. That was the great thing about vamps, at least from my point of view: They were dead. Their minds were dead, too. Only once in a coons age did I get any kind of flash from a vampire mind. Shirley Hunter, my brother's boss at his parish roadwork job, asked me where Jason was when I brought a pitcher of beer to his table. Shirley was universally known as Catfish. Your guess is as good as mine, I said mendaciously, and he winked at me. The first guess as to where Jason was always involved a woman, and the second guess usually included another woman. The tableful of men, still in their working clothes, laughed more than the answer warranted, but then they'd had a lot of beer. I raced back to the bar to get three bourbon-and-Cokes from Terry Bellefleur, Portia's cousin, who was working under pressure. Terry, a Vietnam vet with a lot of physical and emotional scars, appeared to be holding up well on this busy night. He liked simple jobs that required concentration. His graying auburn hair was pulled back in a ponytail and his face was intent as he plied the bottles. The drinks were ready in no time, and Terry smiled at me as I put them on my tray. A smile from Terry was a rare thing, and it warmed me. Just as I was turning with my tray resting on my right hand, trouble erupted. A Louisiana Tech student from Ruston got into a one-on-one class war with Jeff LaBeff, a redneck who had many children and made a kind of living driving a garbage truck. Maybe it was just a case of two stubborn guys colliding and really didn't have much to do with town vs. gown (not that we were that close to Ruston). Whatever the reason for the original quarrel, it took me a few seconds to realize the fight was going to be more than a shouting match. In those few seconds, Terry tried to intervene. Moving quickly, he got between Jeff and the student and caught firm hold of both their wrists. I thought for a minute it would work, but Terry wasn't as young or as active as he had been, and all hell broke loose. You could stop this, I said furiously to Mickey as I hurried past his and Taras table on my way to try to make peace. He sat back in his chair and sipped his drink. Not my job, he said calmly. I got that, but it didn't endear the vampire to me, especially when the student whirled and took a swing at me as I approached him from behind. He missed, and I hit him over the head with my tray. He staggered to one side, maybe bleeding a little, and Terry was able to subdue Jeff LaBeff, who was looking for an excuse to quit. Incidents like this had been happening with more frequency, especially when Sam was gone. It was evident to me that we needed a bouncer, at least on weekend nights . . . and full-moon nights. The student threatened to sue. What's your name? I asked. Mark Duffy, the young man said, clutching his head. Mark, where you from? Minden. I did a quick evaluation of his clothes, his demeanor, and the contents of his head. I'm gonna enjoy calling your mama and telling her you took a swing at a woman, I said. He blanched and said no more about suing, and he and his buds left soon after. It always helps to know the most effective threat. We made Jeff leave, too. Terry resumed his place behind the bar and began dispensing drinks, but he was limping slightly and had a strained look in his face, which worried me. Terry's war experiences hadn't left him real stable. I'd had enough trouble for one night. But of course the night wasn't over

yet. About an hour after the fight, a woman came into Merlottes. She was plain and plainly dressed in old jeans and a camo coat. She had on boots that had been wonderful when theyd been new, but that had been a long time ago. She didnt carry a purse, and she had her hands thrust into her pockets. There were several indicators that made my mental antennae twitch. First of all, this gal didnt look right. A local woman might dress like that if she were going hunting or doing farm work, but not to come to Merlottes. For an evening out at the bar, most women fixed themselves up. So this woman was in a working mode; but she wasnt a whore by the same reasoning. That meant drugs. To protect the bar in Sams absence, I tuned in to her thoughts. People dont think in complete sentences, of course, and Im smoothing it out, but what was running through her head was along the order of: Three vials left getting old losing power gotta sell it tonight so I can get back to Baton Rouge and buy some more. Vampire in the bar if he catches me with vamp blood Im dead. This town is a dump. Back to the city first chance I get. She was a Drainer, or maybe she was just a distributor. Vampire blood was the most intoxicating drug on the market, but of course vamps didnt give it up willingly. Draining a vampire was a hazardous occupation, boosting prices of the tiny vials of blood to amazing sums. What did the drug user get for parting with a lot of money? Depending on the age of the blood that is, the time since itd been removed from its owner and the age of the vampire from whom the blood had been removed, and the individual chemistry of the drug user, it could be quite a lot. There was the feeling of omnipotence, the increased strength, acute vision, and hearing. And most important of all for Americans, an enhanced physical appearance. Still, only an idiot would drink black-market vampire blood. For one thing, the results were notoriously unpredictable. Not only did the effects vary, but those effects could last anywhere from two weeks to two months. For another thing, some people simply went mad when the blood hit their systems sometimes homicidally mad. Id heard of dealers who sold gullible users pigs blood or contaminated human blood. But the most important reason to avoid the black market in vamp blood was this: Vampires hated Drainers, and they hated the users of the drained blood (commonly known as bloodheads). You just dont want a vampire pissed off at you. There werent any off-duty police officers in Merlottes that night. Sam was out wagging his tail somewhere. I hated to tip off Terry, because I didnt know how hed react. I had to do something about this woman. Truly, I try not to intervene in events when my only connection comes through my telepathy. If I stuck my oar in every time I learned something that would affect the lives around me (like knowing the parish clerk was embezzling, or that one of the local detectives took bribes), I wouldnt be able to live in Bon Temps, and it was my home. But I couldnt permit this scraggy woman to sell her poison in Sams bar. She perched on an empty barstool and ordered a beer from Terry. His gaze lingered on her. Terry, too, realized something was wrong about the stranger. I came to pick up my next order and stood by her. She needed a bath, and shed been in a house heated by a wood fireplace. I made myself touch her, which always improved my reception. Where was the blood? It was in her coat pocket. Good. Without further ado, I dumped a glass of wine down her front. Dammit! she said, jumping off the stool and patting ineffectually at her chest. You are the clumsiest-ass woman I ever saw! Scuse me, I said abjectly, putting my tray on the bar and meeting Terrys eyes briefly. Let me put some soda on that. Without waiting for her permission, I pulled her coat down her arms. By the time she understood what I was doing and began to struggle, I had taken charge of the coat. I tossed it over the bar to Terry. Put some soda on that, please, I said. Make sure the stuff in her pockets didnt get wet, too. Id used this ploy before. I was lucky it was cold weather and shed had the stuff in her coat, not in her jeans pocket. That would have taxed my inventiveness. Under the coat, the woman was wearing a very old Dallas Cowboys T-shirt. She began shivering, and I wondered if shed been sampling more conventional drugs. Terry made a show of patting soda on the wine stain. Following my hint, he delved into the pockets. He looked down at his hand with disgust, and I heard a clink as he threw the vials in the trash can behind the bar. He returned everything else to her pockets. Shed opened her mouth to shriek at Terry when she realized she really couldnt. Terry stared directly at her, daring her to mention the blood. The people around us watched with interest. They knew something was up, but not what, because the whole thing had gone down very quickly. When Terry was sure she wasnt going to start yelling, he handed me the coat. As I held it so she could slide her arms in, Terry told her, Dont you come back here no more. If we kept throwing people out at this rate, we wouldnt have many customers. You redneck son of a bitch, she said. The crowd around us drew in a collective breath. (Terry was almost as unpredictable as a bloodhead.) Doesnt matter to me what you call me, he said. I guess an insult from you is no insult at all. You just stay away. I expelled a long breath of relief. She shoved her way through the crowd. Everyone in the room marked her progress toward the door, even Mickey the vampire. In fact, he was doing something with a device in his hands. It looked like one of those cell phones that can take

a picture. I wondered to whom he was sending it. I wondered if she'd make it home. Terry pointedly didn't ask how I'd known the scruffy woman had something illegal in her pockets. That was another weird thing about the people of Bon Temps. The rumors about me had been floating around as long as I could remember, from when I was little and my folks put me through the mental health battery. And yet, despite the evidence at their disposal, almost everyone I knew would much rather regard me as a dim and peculiar young woman than acknowledge my strange ability. Of course, I was careful not to stick it in their faces. And I kept my mouth shut. Anyway, Terry had his own demons to fight. Terry subsisted on some kind of government pension, and he cleaned Merlotte's early in the morning, along with a couple of other businesses. He stood in for Sam three or four times a month. The rest of his time was his own, and no one seemed to know what he did with it. Dealing with people exhausted Terry, and nights like tonight were simply not good for him. It was lucky he wasn't in Merlotte's the next night, when all hell broke loose. From Publishers Weekly Starred .

Harris's rousing fifth Sookie Stackhouse fantasy-mystery (after 2004's *Dead to the World*) pits vampires, were-creatures, shifters and one fairy godmother against a sniper with an apparent aversion to nonhumans. If trying to discover who's behind the shootings isn't enough, the telepathic cocktail waitress from Bon Temps, La., has to cope with a few other distractions: her sexy "Were" friend, Alcide Herveaux, needs her help in his father's bid to become the next leader of the local werewolf pack; her boss, Sam Merlotte (a collie in his spare time), gets shot; her house partly burns down; and what's she to do about the handsome vampire bartender who dresses as a pirate at Sam's place? Between one mishap and another, Sookie is one busy gal. Harris does an admirable job of creating a heroine who's not only interesting but completely believable in a world of the strange and the different. Natural and humorous dialogue and a nicely paced plot that doesn't dwell so much on Sookie's old boyfriends help make this entry the best yet in the series. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.