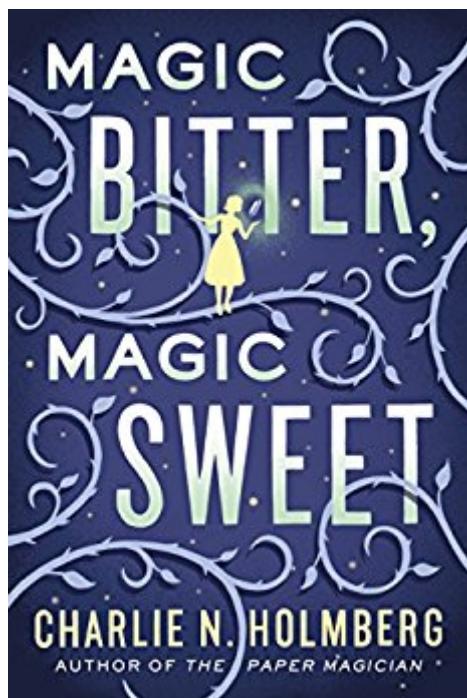


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Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Charlie has done it again- mixed together the ingredients for a delicious book! I read this in a couple of days because I couldn't put it down! Ingenious plot-line that had me thinking things were

one way and then another and finally I decided to just keep reading and be surprised. I wasn't totally surprised by the end, but enough is left to the readers own palate and imagination, allowing us each to savor the flavor for ourselves. Charlie's characters are unique and colorful, yet real enough to remind us of our own life experiences. And the deeper messages she stirs in are important and sometimes a tiny bit spicy. I especially love this quote, "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, Fyel knows it. I am completely ignorant about this hidden realm, but when I bake, I scrape my nails beneath its door." I gave this a five star rating for its depth, mysterious plot and purely delectable characters.

"My mind is like a pan of cake torn apart by eager hands, leaving only the outer crust. It's strange, this story of mine. A tale that starts somewhere in chapter twenty and ends who knows where." Holmberg, Charlie N.. *Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet* (p. 2). 47North. Kindle Edition. The story of Maire, a baker whose heart is unfathomably large, will make your heart swell, cringe, break, stutter in fear and say ahhh. I experienced every emotion as I read this book. The time-frame is a mystery, as is the setting. There are Earth-like towns and cities, but the names are unfamiliar. Maire is a young woman who has lost her memory, and is almost adopted as a family member for whom she bakes wonderful desserts that elicit magical emotions. She has a gift, but she has no memory of her past or the origin of her gift, and yet she is mostly content in her life. One fateful day, Maire sees a spirit, who asks her name, exclaims that "it's not too late" and tells her to run. Her life is upended by marauders and thus begins a(n) (adult) fairy-tale that is as shivery and suspenseful as any Grimms story. In fact, you will find many of your childhood story themes running through the fantasy of this book. I love authors that defy genre. Charlie N. Holmberg (she is indeed a very talented woman) has written a book that is not just a fantasy, not just a suspenseful tale, and not just a romance - but a complex cake of all of those. But be warned - you will put this book down when you can't take the suspense or the emotion and be forced to pick it up again to see what happens next. Magical.

One might think from the description and cover that this novel might be light and whimsical like the author's Paper Magician series. Though it started with the sweet, soon the narrative turned to the dark and bitter, with poignant revelations. In fact, the unlikely comparison of Frankenstein came to mind, as did the more overt references to classic fairy tales (think gingerbread). While some elements sound familiar, others are completely original, leading me to

marvel at Holmberg's range. Magic Bitter, Magic Sweet is ultimately a more adult fantasy than I was expecting, but nevertheless had me turning the pages quickly to find out what was Maire's destiny or origin. The answer may surprise you as it surprised me. And the epilogue left me with more questions than understanding.

What caught my attention initially about this book was the cover. "Don't judge a book by its cover" they say...but sometimes that's the bait you need to catch someone's attentions :) But what sold the deal was the not-to-common premise: A baker who can infuse emotions into her goods, emotions that don't manipulate it's eater, but inspire their emotions. Now, that was the hook...a hook that drove me to finish this 278 page book in two days.

WHAT I LOVED ABOUT THE TALE (NO SPOILERS):

Fragmented Narrative: I really appreciate that though the narrative has a clear progression, it does not feel very linear...but that we get glimpses of pieces that we aren't completely sure about...encourage you to think and TRY to piece things together. Of course all that is settled by the end. But I couldn't help but try to anticipate the direction of things...and sometimes I was wrong...or my assumption was only partly correct. No book has had me guessing wrong in a long time. In addition to all this, the multiple fragments of seemingly three different storylines add to the "world-is-bigger" feeling of the tale. And may I add that the inclusion of other literary sources was ingeniously utilized?

Formatting: Also the way they format the pages and chapter headings is very intentional and accentuates the above point.

Charisma in the visuals and a clear, but impactful and personable narration: This author is really really good at helping you visualize what's going on to the point that you begin to feel the situation.

Themes: At the base of this grandiose tale is the them of "Bitter & Sweet" and how it impacts not only the protagonist, but those around her. Bitterness from immediate trials, Sweetness from generous random acts of kindness, bitterness that grew from mistakes of the past to Sweetness at knowing you are still loved. This book covers a lot of ground, but all of them are wonderful to explore.

A NOTE OF CONTENT: However, with all the good things about this book (and the very playful cover). This is not a young adult book but a very mature one. In addition, the author is largely characterized by her vividness in the writing. This does also include the more brutal and violent parts of the Tale. These don't happen all to often, nor are they gratuitous, and they do add an important layer to the tale, but they definitely are intense. So, if you are particularly averse to that, this could be a difficult aspect for you. Also, love making is alluded to at one point. It's hard to describe this without going into specific spoilers, but I'll try. Basically, this is not pornographic or dime-romance style. It's poetically utilized to describe when a divine couple have decided to become husband and wife ("lahsts" is the term used here). You'll

understand it in context, but basically, it signifies a union between the two...but does not go into any detail of the actual act.

THE PACKAGE: My book is the paperback edition. Besides the tale itself, it also has the prologue of her other book "Followed by Frost". This book uses typical modern novel paper as often found in "New York times bestseller paperbacks".

All in All: This is a book that, though brutally dark at times, uses that darkness to help us face brutal realities, break past the bitterness, and enter a time of sweetness and hope.

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