



BOOK OF THE MONTH

A Book of Tongues
By Gemma Files
ChiZine
278 pp, \$16.95

Fango readers residing in Toronto may recall the days when noted, International Horror Guild award-winning horror fiction writer Gemma Files used to scribble film reviews for lefty arts and culture newspaper *Eye Weekly*. As a film-school-slogging youth, I fell in love with her, the way she championed the less fortunate and less popular pictures and how her critical barometer was dictated by her eccentricities and personal life experience. She was also a kick-ass wrangler of words (and I told her as much in an open letter to the *Eye*—the very first time my voice was put in print).

Since those early days, Files' skills have clearly sharpened, her dark, deeply deranged and unapologetically sexual works careening wildly into the messier realms of the Freudian id while serving as works of unfettered imagination. Her short stories have been adapted for the short-lived *The Hunger* TV series and collected in two brilliant collections, *Kissing Carrion* and *A Worm in Every Heart*. But it is in her first novel, *A Book of Tongues: Volume One of the Hexslinger Series*, that her outrageous but creatively honest chops get free rein to freak out.

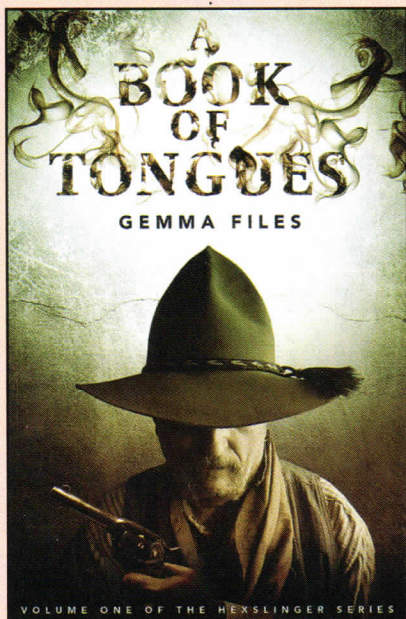
The story's setup is classic American Western, with a twist: In a blown-out, post-Civil War West, a Pinkertons agent named Ed Morrow attempts to infiltrate

the world of "hexslinger" wizard/outlaw Asher Rook and drag his supernatural secrets back to his employers. But the deeper he gets wormed into Rook's universe, the more ensnared in homosexually fueled hocus-pocus he becomes, with Rook's lover Chess Pargeter figuring heavily into his very survival. Somehow, Aztec goddesses and the fate of the planet also make their way into Files' completely outlandish head-spin of a story, and the easily offended or those put off by a challenging narrative need not apply.

Files has always worn her influences on her sleeve, and *Tongues* reads like the culmination of myriad diverse stimuli. The operatic drama of Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York* rubs against the cross-genre cheek of *True Blood*, mashed with a healthy dollop of J.R.R. Tolkien by way of a dusty, mud- and semen-caked *Deadwood*; and of course, Files' own hot 'n' heavy gay-erotica leanings also get a full XXX-rated workout here. That seems to be the source of her power—blending pulp fiction with profound, often poetic prose that does what all good horror fiction should do, which is mirror our collective humanity while jettisoning us into the black, blood-drenched ether.

A Book of Tongues is truly one-of-a-kind, violent, carnal and creepy, and also serves as the setup for a subsequent installment. With foreplay this good, the follow-up book should be the kind of phantasmagorical climax Files' fans have been waiting for.

—Chris Alexander



Dog Blood
By David Moody
St. Martin's
272 pp, \$23.99

"Hate means never having to say you're sorry." That's what Danny McCoyne learns in *Dog Blood*, David Moody's follow-up to his 2009 novel *Hater*. One day, the world is "normal." The

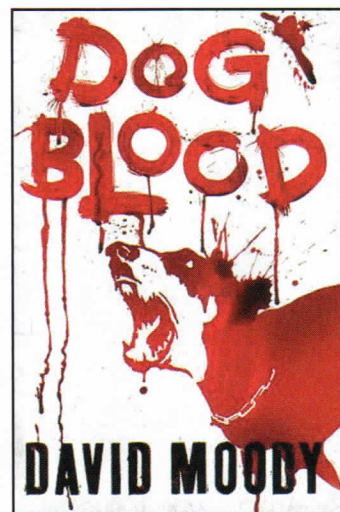
next, random vicious and lethal attacks are taking place in which people (dubbed Haters) assault and kill strangers, friends and family. There is no explanation, only rage.

Hater was a neat spin on the zombie apocalypse yarn, and in this sequel society has been divided in half: You're either a

"civilized" Unchanged person or a deadly Hater hell-bent on killing all un-Hater humans. Haters are essentially pissed-off zombies intent on carnage. They don't know why they rage and kill; they just do. In *Dog Blood*, the government is nonexistent and civilization as we knew it has collapsed. Humans live in refugee camps

supervised by the military. Food and water are scarce. The country's infrastructure is decimated. It is a time of war and survival, and the Haters are planning an offensive that will finish off the humans once and for all.

Dog Blood follows two threads: that of Danny (told in first



person)—the Hater protagonist from the first novel who's on a mission to find his daughter—and Danny's cousin Mark (told in third person), who is living in a dilapidated apartment building with his family and reluctantly accommodating Danny's wife and Hater child. Moody's allegorical tale touches on terrorism, Hurricane Katrina, 9/11, the us-vs.-them mentality and how insecurity and fear can cause people to make disastrous and destructive decisions. The author is adept at dish-ing out the ultraviolence, Anthony Burgess-style, but *Dog Blood's* attraction isn't the bloodshed; rather, it's Danny's growing understanding of who he is, what he stands for and, most importantly, what he has both lost and gained along the way.

This follow-up has its moments, but Moody should have incorporated this story into *Hater* and made the saga one stand-alone tale. Passages describing Danny's Hater state of mind grow stale, and the Hater incursion at the novel's end feels rushed and incomplete. Ultimately, *Dog Blood's* emotional and effectual occasions are undermined and compromised by Moody's apparent desire to spawn a series of *Hater* novels.

—Allan Dart

Play Dead
By Ryan Brown
Pocket
352 pp, \$24.99

Sometimes you really can