

“DEEP BREATHING”

By G. Davies Jandrey (Fireship Press). \$18 paperback; \$7.95 Kindle

Looming over the action in J. Davies Jandrey’s latest Tucson-set novel is the mural on the Tucson Warehouse and Transfer building on East Sixth Street. Against a cactus background, a sultry dark-haired beauty gazes out, her heavy-lidded eyes and parted lips denoting either sensuality or disdain, but not compassion. The mural shows up throughout the book, so it’s not hard to see it resonating symbolically — a higher power, perhaps, imperiously indifferent to the plights of those below. And the characters in “Deep Breathing” have more than their share of plights

Point-of-view character Abby Bannister, a wheelchair user with a twisted spine, is CEO of a nonprofit (Gimps Serving Gimps) that assists the disabled. Her life-long friend Robert — gay, stricken with a neurological disease — also uses a wheelchair. When Abby gives a television interview featuring Gimps Serving Gimps, she captures the attention of two more damaged individuals: her long-lost Cousin Fey, homeless and drug-addicted; and an unnamed self-appointed Angel of Death for the disabled. As Abby and Robert search for suitable romantic relationships, Fey struggles to rehabilitate herself to regain the custody of her young son, and “gimps” (Abby’s word) show up dead, the “Angel of Death” trains his focus on Abby.

Jandrey makes good use of the Fourth Avenue/ Sixth Street neighborhood for this novel. Its sidewalks, access to public transportation, and modest housing lend credibility and vulnerability to Abby’s situation. She convincingly portrays the mechanics of homelessness — from shelter rules and the protocol at the blood bank, to tent city etiquette — and creates effective suspense. Most successful, however, in “Deep Breathing” is Jandrey’s depiction of the physically disabled not as victims, but as independent agents

of their own destinies. (God, by the way, doesn't come off so well in this novel. It's the "voice" of God that inspires the murderer.) Abby might as well pray to the indifferent warehouse mural lady for all the good prayer would do her. She's heroic on her own.

Jandrey's depiction of society's marginalized continues to be sympathetic and informed. Her prose is increasingly nuanced. This reader, for one, would welcome more Abby & Co.

— *Christine Wald-Hopkins*, *Arizona Daily Star*,