

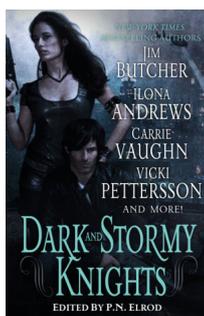
“DARK AND STORMY KNIGHTS” (Book Review)

Written by Rich Mallery
Saturday, 17 July 2010 10:43



Edited by P.N. Elrod (pictured), famed author of the VAMPIRE FILES series, DARK AND STORMY KNIGHTS (St. Martin's Press) is a collection of nine horror/supernatural tales focusing on the modern-day warriors who keep humanity safe from the nightmarish monsters lurking in the shadows. But don't let the title lead you to expect the long-haired, bare-chested "knights in shining armor" from your grandmother's romance novels.

With the exception of Deidre Knight's "Beknighted," there isn't much amour here. The stories in DARK AND STORMY KNIGHTS are action-oriented, with tons of bloodshed and mayhem. From the opening gory words of Ilona Andrews' seductive "A Questionable Client," this reviewer was relieved that he wasn't about to read 300-plus pages of deep, passionate kisses and swollen, throbbing man parts.



In 90 percent of short story anthologies, a third of the stories are exceptional, a third are average and a third are forgettable. DARK AND STORMY KNIGHTS is no exception, the aforementioned "Beknighted" being the most skippable with its bordering-on-silly plot about a woman who paints puzzles that come to life. Also falling into the boring category is Jim Butcher's "Even Hand"; while it contains plenty of explosions and gunplay, the action falls flat and comes dangerously close to ridiculous territory. Shannon Butcher's "The Beacon" also borders on the ludicrous with its "unbeatable" demon that the hero easily defeats.

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Despite these misses, however, there are more than a few gems here. The best story of the bunch belongs to Elrod herself: “Dark Lady” is an impressively well-written twist on the noir genre. Revisiting the undead private detective from VAMPIRE FILES, Elrod crafts a tale worthy of a full-length treatment, with fleshed-out characters who leap off the page, and creates an entertaining and enjoyable read. Liliith Saintcrow’s “Rookwood and Mrs. King” uses a similar protagonist—a vampire gumshoe—to a much different effect. While “Dark Lady” is straight-up noir, “Rookwood” goes straight for the jugular with villains who are more violent and terrifying than Elrod’s real-life gangsters. Unfortunately, with many of these stories featuring a cop/detective/private eye/monster hunter as the star, the common thread becomes tired, and left this reviewer wishing for something different. By the time I got to the final piece, Carrie Vaughn’s “God’s Creatures,” the man-tracking-monster (in this case a werewolf) plot felt “been there, done that.”

Nonetheless, there are definitely a number of original ideas scattered throughout DARK AND STORMY KNIGHTS, especially in Rachel Caine’s “Even a Rabbit Will Bite.” This story has a bit of a BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER feel, with a plot that lures the reader in and a twist that most won’t see coming. The heroine in this story isn’t your typical dragon slayer, and the dragon she stalks is far from your typical fantasy-novel beast, resulting in an intense cat-and-mouse game that this reviewer wishes lasted longer than the tale’s 36 pages.

If you’re looking for something different and dark to read while you’re on the beach waiting for the bartender to bring over your margaritas, this might be worth checking out. Enjoy.



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