ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

FANTASY

A Visitor to Sandahl: Tales of the Bard
C. Lee Brown
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Three Stars (out of Five)

What happens when a group of like-minded fantasy writers discover each other on the Internet and come together on a project? *A Visitor to Sandahl* is a collection of short stories set in a medieval fantasy land compiled by editor and contributor C. Lee Brown for the website, The Next Big Writer. Unyieldingly faithful to the Dungeons & Dragons game universe, yet with some twists, the stories range from romance to the paranormal, with a heavy emphasis on adventure and magic: "From the Sea," by Zephyrus White, chronicles the adventures of the semi-aquatic human female Mara, a small reptilian "Dragoman" called Simon, and Finn the rogue, as they journey to the city of Sandahl to deliver a powerful magical weapon to Lady Astra, a beautiful woman accompanied by wolves; "Cara" by Melissa McDonald depicts the misadventures of a mountain lion transformed into a human and sent into a human settlement to track Lady Astra and rescue her from two thugs hiding out in a small hut in the forest; in "Chirro's Escape," by Karin Rita Gastreich, a boy named Chiro and a sable-like creature called Po escape the clutches of a cruel witch through a shared form of magic; a time-traveler from New Chicago finds himself in a retroactive distant future in Bello Wee's "The Aged."

A Visitor to Sandahl is an eclectic anthology of amateur authors having the chance to prove otherwise: some pull it off and some do not. As typical of the fantasy genre, an emphasis on character development and quest-type plot dominate the style. The employment of creativity varies; most stories utilize traditional fantasy races and classes such as elves, dwarves, drow, witches, and vampires, while others create their own. Slang dialogue in stories such as "Lily White And The Seven Dwarfs" ("and the" capitalized) is written in an excited, breezy style without saying much; however, the ornate descriptions of character and scenery complement each other, and several stories are entertaining enough to be carried on into fantasy novels, leaving the reader to wonder just who will be "The Next Big Writer." Note two examples:

(1) "One group strode menacingly down the street. They had slight muscular builds and dark skin with snow-white hair. They walked with a smooth confidence, and their hands rested

on hilts of razor sharp weapons. Their red eyes blazed with an icy malevolence that made the crowd part for them as they walked through the market."(White, "From the Sea")

(2) "Old, weather soaked roofs are a murky sea before me. Across North Street, to the east, Crystal's Golden Palace emanates an otherworld charm, like an oversized lavish spectre stuffed with pleasures and seeking adoration." (Saville, "Heart of an Assassin")

A Visitor to Sandahl holds something for everyone. The collection's 522 pages are triple-spaced and perfectly aligned for youthful fantasy adventurers and adults interested in light, traditional fantasy.

Derek Cram