

Now Before the Dark: Terribly Serious Darkness, Book Three

Sam Hooker

Black Spot Books (Dec 8, 2020)

Softcover \$18.95 (334pp)

978-1-64548-029-7

The feckless Slood returns in *Now Before the Dark*, the third book in Sam Hooker's Very Serious Darkness series. Once an accountant for gangsters, and a former ghost who's been transfigured into a demon, Slood endures farcical perils and humiliations as he tries to save his magical nation from the Dark.

Silly and sly, the novel is packed with poetic language that reveals the profound dysfunction of Slood's world, in which The Ministry of Etiquette and Guillotines, formerly the Ministry of Surplus Population Management, is one of many malevolent governing bodies that Slood navigates as he rushes to find a solution to the apocalypse. Slood is, as ever, a reluctant hero, subject to bureaucratic forces beyond his control; once he's begun his quest, he finds grudging allies in a reincarnated philosopher, a bard who can't play his noninstrument, and a wizard who passes as a vampire.

With a lyrical tone and hilarious dialogue that do double duty with its world building, the novel continues the brilliant satire seen in the series' earlier books. At times, its clever, funny language overpowers its characterization, and a nonsensical running gag about binary pronouns falls flat. Slood's friends speak in near identical cadences; sometimes, only their individual sets of gripes distinguish them from one another. However, their exuberance and surliness make them effective foils for meek Slood, who is a begrudging participant in his own quest.

The story finds its balance in mixing magical creatures with practical concerns, as with breakups and erstwhile gods. Slood, oft beset and grim of outlook, is a marvelous antihero in this whimsical adventure, and frequent, humorous plays on words, spoofs of contemporary events, and clever reversals of expected dynamics make *Now Before the Dark* a delight.

CLAIRE FOSTER (November / December 2020)

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