



Sages & Swords: Heroic Fantasy Anthology

Daniel E. Blackston, Editor

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Readers and writers of heroic fantasy will find a lot to enjoy in this collection of stories designed to “demonstrate a wide-range [sic] of writing skills.” The publisher hosts both *SwordandSorcery.org* and *Flashing Swords E-zine*, and publishes *Prism Quarterly*, a print publication. While this book is designed to offer “insight into the mechanics of writing” and help would-be authors understand the submission process, there’s plenty of entertainment here as well.

The stories range in skill and professionalism, and include a tale by long-time fantasy writer Tanith Lee (“The World Well Lost,” a tale of Cleopatra—or Kleopatra, as it is spelled here) and an interview with R. A. Salvatore, as well as an article by the editor on “How to Break into Fantasy.” While casual readers and fantasy fans may be tempted to skip the nuts-and-bolts article, beginners (and others) would be well advised to take some of the very basic advice ignored by too many would-be writers in their quest for publication.

Canny readers will appreciate that some stories in the collection take the same premise and tell it from differing points of view, as in “Game of the Krillihitchkin” by Robert J. Santa and “The Morgwa” by Ed Knight. Both deal with the ages-old theme of a monster preying on a village, but how they approach it is very different.

In “Game of the Krillihitchkin,” an elderly mage squares off against an even more aged dragon in a game of skerritch as they play for their lives—and the fate of the village. Hallidor the mage has come to kill the crafty hunting dragon that knights and other wizards have been unable to destroy, and finds, instead of a monster, a wise and powerful—though still dangerous—being. As the two square off, the reader hopes that perhaps, this time, there will be a different outcome in the constant war between dragon and human. Santa neatly and subtly highlights the dangers of stereotyping and prejudgment as he paints both dragon and mage with a sympathetic brush.

Ed Knight’s “The Morgwa” tells of a Chippewa father’s determination to save his daughter from being devoured by the monster that haunts his people. Etu seeks out a village elder, Cheveyo, rumored to have been a spirit warrior, to find a way to destroy the Morgwa, and finds that he must give up what he holds most dear in order to succeed.

Blackston is the editor of *Lords and Swords* and a senior editor at SFReader.com. In this collection, other tales that capture the imagination include “Demonkiller” by Vera Nazarian and an old story, Harold Lamb’s novella “The Golden Horde”—a survival from the golden age of pulp fiction. Exotic settings and characters vie with twists of magic and human nature to offer readers a glimpse into other worlds—and a road map to journey there themselves.

MARLENE SATTER (August 18, 2009)

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