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Clarion Review

Mystery

Shadowmaster I--More or Less than Human
Eric Safflind
CreateSpace
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Five Stars (out of Five)

Don't let the cover fool you: this is a carefully nuanced story, even if the villain is a werewolf.

In this exciting mix of thriller, paranormal mystery, and standard private-eye drama, the theme of good versus evil plays out close to home for investigator Barry Sandler and his boss, Adrian Kahler. Exactly who, or what, is lopping the heads off bodies in Baltimore?

The Ravencroft siblings, Sarah and Leonard, are in danger. The seemingly all-knowing enigma that is Adrian Kahler is tasked with finding out who or what is terrorizing the Ravencrofts and the city of Baltimore. With his investigator, Barry Sandler, and his personal assistant, Stanley Egor, Kahler uses his powers of deduction to solve this frightening puzzle.

Sandler realizes that he will no longer need to tail Simon Tate, the only person identified in a photograph of a questionable group being investigated, when he watches Tate's head go rolling down the street and Tate's date run off in the other direction. This provides his introduction to Sarah Ravencroft and her brother, Leonard, and sends Sandler on an investigation into a secret paranormal society of Baltimore. To add to the adventure, Sandler's love connection with Sarah may bring about his own death.

In this first installment of the Shadowmaster series, Eric Safflind creates fascinating, likable characters that make his series readable and appealing. Kahler is Sandler's boss and the head of the investigative team. He is brusque, unyielding, and intuitive. Egor, Kahler's personal assistant, is everyone's caretaker. He is a giant of a man who makes excellent Belgian waffles and is fascinated with photography. Even the evil here is cloaked in charisma, kindness, and appeal. Unfortunately, when the moon is full, personalities and personae change rapidly.

Safflind is an expert at description. His dark sense of humor often rises to the surface,

giving Sandler his personality: “I’d drawn my .45 caliber pistol before the severed head smacked the pavement. I hadn’t moved fast enough. Now I stood there, useless and afraid, watching that ragged, red ball corkscrew along.” A scene on a sailboat in the dead of night, as unknown assailants hunt for Sarah and Sandler, demonstrates Safflind’s skill and knowledge. Sandler uses the spinnaker of the sailboat to set fire to the men and the boat that are pursuing them. The detail is masterful, but not overwhelming.

The cover art is a bit over the top. It shows a hairy paw with sharp claws projecting from each digit. While this image conveys an important element of the narrative, it has the effect of making the book seem more sensational than it is. Safflind has crafted a carefully nuanced story here, even if the villain is a werewolf.

The four volumes in this series were released over a two-day span. Because of the fast-paced story line and the genuine characters, readers will consider this a gift, as all four can be devoured simultaneously.

Lynn Evarts