



The Legend of Alexandros: Belen

A.C. Hernandez

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As with many heroes in fantasy epics, Alexandros has an envy-causing body, and, of course, a “massive sword” which he is called upon repeatedly to wield in a righteous vendetta against a great evil.

There is nothing actually wrong with A. C. Hernandez’s pleasantly lively sword-and-sorcery novel, but there is also very little that is fresh. The forests are dank, the princesses pretty, the monsters acceptably hideous, and the heroes all heroic. Readers encounter a typical but somewhat expanded cast of characters that includes goblins, dwarfs, elves, vampires, harpies, centaurs, amazons, lycans, reanimated corpses, wizards, a gentle dragon named Winston, and a surprise appearance by Priscilla the Mermaid Queen.

Though the “friendly dragon” is by no means new to the fantasy genre, to Hernandez’s credit, Winston is a genuinely engaging character—arguably the most memorable in the tale. There is a charming short story at the end of the book in which Winston relates how he learned to fly. With a talented illustrator, Hernandez could craft a fine children’s book from that material, and it would likely make a bigger splash than this nice but unspectacular novel.

On the other hand, *The Legend of Alexandros: Belen* is well written, and there are some zippy one-liners. For example, the elves quip that the “V” emblazoned on the armor of their haughty prince Valchor stands for “vanity.” While the plot lacks big surprises, it includes most of the major features of the genre. The novel’s climax is the indispensable final confrontation between heroes and villains. Readers will find the hero’s mandatory pre-battle bravado in the statement, “I am going to fight, win, and then drink until I fall over,” as well as the sidekick’s obligatory eve-of-big-fight premonition of doom: “I feel as if this was not a good idea.”

While some might chide Hernandez for adding another book to an already overweight catalog, that would be too easy—and unfair. What Hernandez does here has been done before, but not always this well. *The Legend of Alexandros: Belen* is unlikely to become a classic, but readers who hunger for a well-written fantasy quest will not be disappointed. They may even come to like the characters enough to muse, as Winston the friendly dragon does, “I wonder where we are off to after this?”

MARK G. MCLAUGHLIN (November 8, 2011)

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