Clarion Review

Science Fiction

We Stand United
Dean Crease
AuthorHouse
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One Star (out of Five)

Fast-paced epic pulls out all the stops with classic good-guy, bad-guy fantasy.

Color-coded warriors with supernatural powers are humanity's last defense against the Entity, a horde of undead abominations that are "pure evil." With the Entity stand the Belligerents, humans who have betrayed their species to side with the forces of evil. Standing against these dark powers are warriors like Dean, who can fly, shoot lightning out of their hands, and even go so far as to rewrite the memories of woodland creatures.

We Stand United is the second book by Dean Crease, a sequel to *The Green Warriors*. It begins with a small battle against a few Entity and escalates from there, all the way to a final showdown. There is an interesting twist in the last moments of the book when Dean is joined by an assortment of stereotypical characters (cigar-chomping men with shotguns, stoic leaders with axes) that are nearly impossible to distinguish from one another. *We Stand United* suffers from melodramatic prose. Malcom, who is bad with girls, meets Charlie, a girl: "Malcom … [holds] Charlie close to his own body, feeling a different kind of happiness, feeling love for the first time."

There is value to a direct, fast-paced book—the world of fantasy writing is overflowing with epics that take hundreds of pages to advance the core plot. However, *We Stand United* is too short. It offers little time for readers to get to know the characters, the world, the stakes. The narrative voice is overused in an effort to streamline the story, but the result is a loss of depth and gravitas.

Even clichéd characters and plot devices can be enjoyable if fully developed. John, the gruff, bear-like leader of Dean and his Green Warriors, is shown sobbing "loud and proud" at a wedding. The idea of the burly warrior-general with a soft heart is hardly a new one in fantasy,

but it's endearing all the same, and John could have been given dimension as a character.

One particular problem is the seeming lawlessness of the world in the book. Good fantasy needs rules, no matter how fantastic. Rules give readers the ability to understand the world they are visiting. Everyone seems to have superpowers as needed. The Incredibles said it well: "When everyone's super, no one is." After the third or fourth time Dean displays unprecedented magical powers to save the day, one may stop caring.

The book also suffers from an unclear target audience. The simplicity of the language, sentence structure, and plot all point to a children's book, but the story is violent, gory, and dystopian, and it contains occasional coarse language that would make it inappropriate for very young readers.

We Stand United could be a fun, fast-paced story of good guys versus bad guys, but it needs significantly more meat on its bones, with time and space given to the development of characters and setting.

Kenrick Vezina