

Awakening the Beast
Edited by Tara Gavin
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The novel pretty much rules the roost in every book-length fiction category, SF/F/LI included. Yes, short fiction hangs on tenaciously in our magazines (witness the worthy publication presently in your hot little hands). But even here, and despite a rich tradition of anthologies and single-author collections, the shorter lengths experience ongoing difficulty getting before the public in book form.

This is doubly so for new works of in-between lengths (novelettes, novellas). So when I locate an anthology of original, novella-length supernatural tales—from a major book publisher, no less—I take notice. The fact this one is from a publisher outside our genre ‘tradition’ didn’t faze me. And the idea of mixing genres—here portraying sexual and romantic love in a supernatural context—is fine by me. I’ve done so myself in several stories—though with perhaps a bit less focus on the purely romantic. But that’s just a question of slightly different emphasis, really. So I picked up this anthology of six original, novella-length stories of ‘paranormal romance’ with a hopeful spirit.

I read it and, on the whole, much enjoyed it.

My favorites were by Olivia Gates and Barbara J. Hancock. In Gates’s tale, a vengeful vampire-demon hybrid wages a long and lonely private war against various supernatural creatures. Then this violent protector of unknowing humanity meets a seemingly ‘normal’ woman he’s strangely drawn to. Desiree’s actually a new form of human-demon hybrid, with fascinating abilities. But is she friend, foe or something else entirely? Love and lust win out in the end, of course, though only after mutual suspicion leads to the most genuinely horrific and action-packed non-erotic scenes in the book.

Hancock’s “Wilderness” takes a different tack. Powerful and dangerous, but not evil, Cohn’s wandering clan are at the mercy of a brutal government crackdown. Enter Tess, of H.A.E.S. (Humans Against the Exploitation of

Supernaturals—think PETA for werewolves) and a budding psychic in her own right. Non-bedroom adventures lead to serious bonding, personal growth and attractive romantic action.

Elsewhere, Linda O. Johnston’s playful tale pictures a top-secret, shape-shifting military unit facing tabloid exposure. Caridad Pineiro almost matches Gates’s intensity—in both dark fantasy and erotic terms—as bitter Michaela and studly FBI official Jesus confront the vampire-ridden streets of New York and explosive personal desires. Linda Parks gives her very rational psychologist a supernatural and emotional wake-up call in the form of a real, live—well, undead—vampire.

A sword-wielding demon-slayer finds trouble and hot love in “Return of the Beast” by Lisa Renee Jones. This one felt a bit overwritten. The subplot involving the female lead’s friend wasn’t truly resolved and Jones’s near-compulsive use of the word ‘scrubbed’ when others might’ve served better—5 times/twice on page 18 alone?—bothered me. Yet even this one was, uh, not bad. And when the weakest story in an anthology is still pretty much okay, and others are considerably better, it’s a book worth looking for—even if, like me, you’re not normally a reader of ‘romance’ fiction—‘paranormal’ or otherwise!

— Jim Lee

Bad-Ass Faeries 2: Just Plain Bad
Edited by Danielle Ackley-McPhail, Jeffrey Lyman,
L. Jagi Lamplighter, and Lee C. Hillman
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Bad-Ass Faeries 2: Just Plain Bad is the second collection of stories in the Bad-Ass Faeries anthology series. It contains twenty stories that take the idea of faeries as helpful, sweet creatures and turn it on its head. Of course, this gets much closer to the roots of faerie lore, where the fae often ranged from pranksters to downright malicious creatures. This collection also stands the traditional fairy tale on its

head by setting the stories in the present day or the near past, giving this collection a distinctly urban fantasy character.

The anthology is divided into four sections: Rebel Fae, Rogue Fae, Shadow Fae and Enforcer Fae. The stories themselves range the gamut from action to humor to borderline horror. Of the twenty stories, only one didn't completely work for me and that was because it felt like it worked a little too hard to avoid clichés. However, even that story had fun moments and I suspect it would appeal to a number of readers.

For me, the standout stories included "Moonshine" by Bernie Mojzes about a faerie who sells her own particular brand of alcohol to the mob in the 1920s. Another standout was "The Seelie Seven" by Lee C. Hillman—a humorous story about a band of faeries who must steal a magical egg disguised as a disco ball. I also really enjoyed "Loopholes" by Phil Brucato about a lawyer who solves legal problems for the fae and finds himself

in deep trouble when his partner cleans out their office and disappears. Many other stories in this collection also deserve mention.

If you like solid urban fantasy or faeries that defy your wildest expectations, then you don't want to miss *Bad-Ass Faeries 2: Just Plain Bad*. Don't forget to look up the original *Bad-Ass Faeries* or the third book in the series, *Bad-Ass Faeries 3: In All Their Glory*.

— David Lee Summers



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