

“SIN’S DARK CARESS” (Book Review)

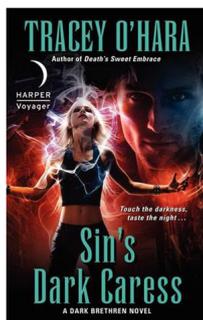
Written by Michael Compton

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The need to contemporize the horror/fantasy genres through juxtaposition with real-life modern-day tropes is by no means a new trend in fantasy fiction.

Authors such as Neil Gaiman are adept pros at this with titles such as *AMERICAN GODS* and the *SANDMAN* graphic novels, effortlessly integrating ancient demigods, Eastern European folklore and female personifications of death into a rich and otherwise grounded contemporary Americana. That’s the top end of the spectrum; below that you have the likes of Joss Whedon’s *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* and Mike Mignola’s *HELLBOY*, whose authors are quite competent at weaving a rich and dynamic series of stories within the realm of the supernatural, interspersed with present-day humor and wit. Then, toward the veritable bottom of the barrel, among the lowest common denominator the subgenre has to offer, you have bargain-bin books like *SIN’S DARK CARESS* by Tracey O’Hara (pictured above).



SIN’S DARK CARESS (Harper Voyager) is the third book in O’Hara’s *Dark Brethren* saga that, as the author’s own website put it, takes place in “a modern alternate earth where paranormal creatures co-exist in a tenuous peace with the human race.” It’s a fictitious world populated with the “Aeternus” and “Dreniacs” (otherwise known to the non-pretentious as vampires), “Animalians” (werewolves) and even merpeople. While the other books in the series centered on other parahuman heroines such as vamp bounty hunter Antoinette Petrescu and shapeshifter Kitt Jordan, *SIN’S DARK CARESS* deals with “forensic witch” Bianca Sin, a seasoned seer who utilizes her thaumaturgical abilities to aid the police in investigations involving the occult. (It’s an occupation that, if it worked in actuality, would lead them to their greatest enemy of all: magician turned skeptic/psychic debunker James Randi.)

In *SIN’S DARK CARESS*, bodies begin to turn up in New York City alleyways, the crime scenes booming with dark energies—energies that Bianca is able to sense with not only her witch-born clairvoyance, but also a device not altogether unlike the PKE meter showcased in *GHOSTBUSTERS*. Aided by the bloodsucking Kitt, lurid incubus Cody and the Harley-riding

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werebear Oberon (not to mention a tiny blue dragon...don't ask), our protagonist embarks on an adventure that will rock the very fabric of the metaphysical world, albeit leaving the reader cold and bewildered.

Another major character worth mentioning is hard-nosed detective Lancelot McManus, who is rather brashly given every cop stereotype known to man. He's a shabby drunk with a substance-abuse problem who works hard while unshaven and perpetually wearing the same old wrinkled suit from the night before. He meanders around the story saying things like "You're not going soft on me, are you?" and "You just leave that to me." He's rough around the edges like Humphrey Bogart (if Bogart had to deal with tweenage conceptualizations of Dracula), but deep down he has a heart of gold and is one of Bianca's closest confidants.

It's easy to pick a book like this apart, especially aspects such as The Academy of Parahuman Studies, a center for supernatural research whose academic body consists of various superhumans (not altogether unlike Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry or Charles Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters). But, truth be told, this vein of fiction most certainly has its audience, and SIN'S DARK CARESS, with its use of expletives and obligatory sexuality, falls more on the Anita Blake end of the spectrum than that which contains Stephanie Meyer's TWILIGHT saga. While the novel most certainly makes use of stale motifs, such tactics can be useful when writing what would otherwise be viewed as a police procedural with a bit of a paranormal flair.

Furthermore, it's hard to imagine that the author herself isn't aware of what she's doing: angling to a lucrative demographic of women in their late teens/early 20s who'll read the book on their commute to work and then pass it along to their late-40s/early-50s mothers who'll do the same in the hopes of shared interest. Plus, apt generalizations aside, you could completely see this material adapted into successful CW programming, sandwiched somewhere between SUPERNATURAL and VAMPIRE DIARIES, if not a worthwhile follow-up to a rerun of GILMORE GHOULS.

