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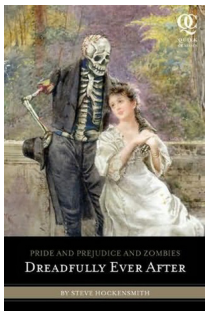
Disgrace is not the lowest point to which one can sink. Death, or rather undeath, is somewhat less acceptable. Nevertheless, whenever possible, one should avoid succumbing to either. The first gruesome parody of Jane Austen’s classic, PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES (Quirk Books, 2009) met with such success, that Quirk editor Jason Rekulak requested the story be continued. Author Seth Grahame-Smith was at work on ABRAHAM LINCOLN, VAMPIRE HUNTER, so Steve Hockensmith was asked to take over the project. In 2010, he released a prequel, DAWN OF THE DREADFULS; DREADFULLY EVER AFTER completes the P&P&Z trilogy.

Regency England is overwhelmed by a plague causing the dead to rise and rage, dismembering and eating each other and the living at an alarming rate. London has been sectioned off to prevent the spread of the ghastly infection and provide safety to its upper classes, but the rotting population of mutilated, cannibalistic corpses continues to thrive, constantly infiltrating even the poshest sections and best families.



Wealthy citizens of stout heart undertake rigorous training in the “deadly (martial) arts,” and become formidable Shaolin warriors. Ninjas are imported and hired to protect the upper classes. Ladies who are accomplished sword wielders and throwing-star slingers typically abandon their weaponry once they are married, of course, risking limb to save face.

Not the courageous and outspoken Elizabeth Bennet-Darcy, however. The hours she spends slaughtering dreadfuls (zombies) at husband Fitwilliam’s side are the most invigorating, joyful and unifying. A momentary lapse of caution, unfortunately, leaves Fitzwilliam viciously bitten in the neck by an unmentionable (zombie). He is doomed; their perfect life together stands on the brink of ruin.

Fitzwilliam’s indomitable aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, has access to a serum that delays the final stages of the “Zed” disease and knows of a rumored cure. She offers Elizabeth her help in securing it, but at the cost of her dishonor as a lady. Her disgrace will be a delightful bonus for Lady Catherine and her somber, mysterious and ultra-creepy daughter, Anne; they are still furious that Elizabeth dared insinuate herself into the family. This is their chance for revenge.

The experimental cure is the brainchild of surly Sir Angus MacFarquhar; it is scarce and available only to the very most privileged. Elizabeth is to disguise her identity and romance it away from him. The fallback plan is for Kitty Bennet, the sillier sister, to seduce MacFarquhar’s dandy son, Bunny. They are assisted by highly disciplined warriors: the studious sister, Mary; their father, Mr. Bennet; Nezu, the handsome, dignified ninja; and the enigmatic Mr. Quayle, who exists, well amputated, in a black wheeled box, pulled by two brilliant, loyal, (slightly disfigured) mutts.

DREADFULLY EVER AFTER is a masterpiece of parody and wit. The parlance is brilliant; Austen’s framework is a perfect foil for Hockensmith’s sharp, clever vernacular. The humor is subtle at times, and rollicking at others, especially if you find humor in graphic mutilation, tastefully accomplished. Not a page passes without an ingenious phrase, insight or creative decapitation. Possibly an improvement over the original, DREADFULLY EVER AFTER is not a superficial reworking of a classic for easy laughs; the entire novel is rich in social, racial and gender commentary, as well as a genuine page-turner.

The alternation between polite, mannered conversation and depravity is riveting, like lifting your teacup and discovering a masticated eyeball floating in it. Hockensmith pulls no punches with the carnage, skillfully working the dichotomy between a novel of manners and a work of gore. DREADFULLY EVER AFTER (and the PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES series) is surprising and unique, a real delight for fans of any level of horror.

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