

“DARK FAITH: INVOCATIONS” (Book Review)

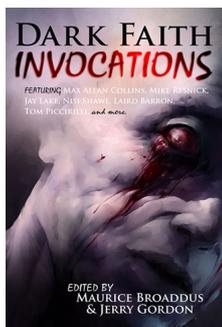
Written by Michael Gingold

Saturday, 29 September 2012 09:58



“Why religion?” is a topic bordering on cliché in current affairs. The rise (or perhaps the gathering in volume) of atheism and strict Christianity now permeates the media and beyond to such a staggering extent that, when you begin to hold Internet, TV, film and written content against each other, the oldest argument in history seems to be everywhere.

Where there was once the black or gay or woman character as the representative of the minority, it is now easy to spot the non-religious new member in a very special “I don’t believe” episode of HOW I MET YOUR MOTHER or LAW & ORDER. It’s this shift in popular culture that makes DARK FAITH: INVOCATIONS (Apex Publications), a collection of belief-centered short stories, come off at first as a tired idea and then as a fascinating fictional analysis of faith.



Horror, of course, is multifaceted, from cartoonish serial killers to slow, quiet descents into madness, yet regardless, there is always the expectation of feeling horrified, to put it simply. DARK FAITH: INVOCATIONS brings this sensation gradually, developed through miniature yet extravagant trials of faith. Religion or belief, at their base, when the texts, habits and instruments are stripped away, are all about need. This need changes with the person and the circumstances—to feel loved or protected or to just continue with all they have ever truly known—but it is need nonetheless. DARK FAITH recognizes, and every story reflects, this idea, from characters devoted to futuristic exploits of protecting the world in His name to an intimate moment in a Divinity Boutique, where people can literally choose their God to serve their specific desire.

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Honestly, capitalizing on the inherent cravings behind belief in easy. DARK FAITH: INVOCATIONS brilliance lies in how it exposes the dark and terrifying nature of those needs. The book’s 29 authors, in ways subtle and explosive, expose the desperate nature of belief and the subsequent unearthing of vulnerability: A child who digs in his yard for two years, looking for the gift God told him was left underground, or a man who has been made machine to battle the ancient creatures of the apocalypse confused by the comfort of a warm body pressed against him. As these examples of the fragility of vulnerability are brought to life, contempt for the destruction wielded to protect that vulnerability keeps this collection from becoming another CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL knockoff. Each author expresses a unique idea, from a frank experience with a prick of an archangel guarding the Garden of Eden to a crater of bloody, pulverized peacocks.

The horror in these stories is their shared theme: You are your belief, and the consequences of that belief. A woman drives willingly to fight the Buddhism that is destroying the world as she sees it destroying all beauty in her path. Cancer strikes the body, stripping away health, comforts and basic belief, leaving only the “catechism of cancer.” A priest, a minister and a rabbi walk into a hospital and leave a woman claiming to know the true answer dead. The stories are well-crafted and transition smoothly from one voice to the next, reminding you over and over again, “If there is someone or something looking over you, it doesn’t mean you will be happy or that everything will be OK.” Even when you know it, that thought is horrifying.

