



Hammer and Bone

Kirby Crow

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The purest evil lives in the hearts of men.

Carnival mystics. Zombie tribes. Bad magic in the Bayou. Mage-princes, alien cities, and soul-stealing priests. The grim monsters in the worlds of these dark, speculative tales are true horrors, but it's the people you should fear the most.

People like Michel, a boy pining for his best friend, Ray. But a presence in the swamp calls Michel to avenge another lost love, and he must decide which summons to answer. Or Angelo, a prescient cop who denies his visions until they endanger the man he loves. Or Bellew, an overseer in a shantytown of criminals sheltering a revenant and feeding it from their ranks.

From ruined lands of steam and iron, to haunted Southern forests, to brutal city streets where hope and damnation flow from the same spring, only a few stubborn souls possess the heart to challenge evil on its own terms. Some wield magic, some turn to rage or even love, but the ones left standing will survive only if they find the courage to carve their own paths to freedom.

Even if it means carving through flesh.

Hammer and Bone Details

Date : Published March 2nd 2015 by Riptide Publishing (first published February 28th 2015)

ISBN : 9781626492059

Author : Kirby Crow

Format : Paperback 236 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Romance, M M Romance, Paranormal, Science Fiction, Steampunk, Horror, Lgbt

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From Reader Review Hammer and Bone for online ebook

G.B. Gordon says

This is classic Crow. The sable beauty of her language adorns every story with the delicate allure of belladonna. Beckoning, sussurating, hypnotizing, leaving you by turns heartbroken, ecstatic, or simply wrung out. But once you've tasted it, you'll always crave more.

My soundtrack for this: Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, "Henry's Dream".

Xing says

You know those deliciously dark stories that start out as a 4-5 star read, but gets lost in the sink hole of last minute sappiness that leaves you with a 1 star aftertaste? Well, Hammer and Bone is NOT that kind of story! Or I should say "stories" (plural). This anthology is a collection of dark, bleak fiction given life through Kirby Crow's magnificent prose.

Some have happy endings. Some have bad endings. And others, I can't really tell, but just went with it. But the common theme of it all is that no one leaves (happy ending or not) unscathed. In terms of length, each story is a pretty quick read: the shortest taking less than 20 minutes to finish, and the longest clocking in at a little over one hour depending on how fast you read.

Also, the anthology as a whole is NOT romance. Each MC fits in the category of M/M or F/F, but the focus of the stories are not in the pairing (if there is one). And lastly, this is not a shared-world anthology. Settings range from steam-punk fantasy to modern-day USA.

Overall, I really enjoyed my time with Hammer and Bone. I was tired of sappy HEA reads, or the failure of certain books in maintaining the sharp delicious edge of darkness from beginning to end. So I came into this anthology with expectations, and Kirby Crow definitely delivered.

Favorite stories:

- 1) Crank
- 2) Hammer and Bone

Least favorite: Shadow and Starlight

Susan Laine says

Wow. Just wow. What a freaking journey this was! When it comes to world-building, Crow is a master of her craft. An imaginative collection of weird tales that suck you into their dark fantasy world and won't let you leave without a couple of dents in your heart and a fond memory of every character in each different world. Taking these stories beyond expectations, the author delivers us stories with happy endings and far-less-than happy endings, and both gay and lesbian pairings. Sad and bleak and depressing took on new meanings in this anthology of splice-of-life tales. More than once I was left heartbroken, most of all by

Hangfire, a beautiful story of love and loss that left me in tears. The author's creativity deserves a definite thumbs-up!

Selina Kyle says

4.5 stars, rounded up to 5 because I can see myself re-reading this more than once.

What I love about short story collections is that they can cover more themes and angles than a full-length novel. What I don't love about them is that I never know how to review them. But this is a really good collection and I have an ARC in exchange for an honest review so I'll do my best and just talk about some of the specific stories.

Crank

This story reminded me of a Dickens novel. Poverty, child labor, abuse, illness...and unlike a lot of other books, the effects of poverty are actually taken into account. For instance the main character, Bellew, is kind of a dick, but it makes sense that he is. Frankly it would have been weird and unrealistic if he had been some noble hero dressed in rags. He's like what Tiny Tim would have grown up to be if little Tim had been born without that heart of gold.

The nightmare wouldn't leave him. In his sleep, the Undertaker had looked like Roben, and when he went to kiss him, Roben grew fangs and chewed his face off, slobbering foam and blood, laughing at him for being fool enough to trust one person in the world.

Considering his rough life and what a dick he is despite his very obvious affection for Roben, I think we would've understood *Bellew has trust issues* without it being spelled out. But heavy-handed moments like that are pretty rare in the book, overall.

I'd give this short a **C** grade, because it feels a little rushed, a little disjointed, especially compared to how polished many of the other stories are.

Hammer and Bone

This story was post-apocalyptic, a combination of zombie horror, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, and a very subtle love story. This being a GLBT-focused collection, the lovers are two women, Bone and Ned. Neither of them are gentle people, but there's such a distinctly different feel to their relationship than to the one just seen in *Crank*. As gritty as the whole collection is, each relationship is distinct and unique in their happiness or misery, which I think many authors struggle with.

B+

Hangfire

My absolute favorite story in the book. And not just because it pings my ultimate weakness (carnival stories! revenge! power dynamics!) I've read seven book series that didn't make me ache the way this story did.

It's about two cops who are partners, but also secretly dating one another. Jory is out and proud; Angelo is divorced and a father desperately trying to keep what little visitation rights he has. When you're a cop in a red state, you don't want your ex-wife throwing your same-sex relationship at a judge. Crow handles this topic frankly and, maybe because I have friends who've been through the same thing, it hurts all the more.

But that's not the worst. I stayed up late reading and then re-reading *Hangfire* and I went to sleep feeling bruised and elated at the same time.

Solid **A** rating for this one. Even if the rest of the book was nothing but chicken scratch I'd recommend it based purely on this story.

No Gods and No Tomorrows

This one struck me as being urban fantasy colored in with the struggles of homeless gay teens and young adults, and the pressures put on them by various bigoted and corrupted priests.

He felt strangely unmoved by [Father] Carn's words, as if his confession had hammered mute some part of him that had been screaming forever.

It's about loyalty to a disadvantaged community versus escaping the hell that comes with being in that community, and figuring out who you are when the rest of the world hates you.

B

Shadow and Starlight

A high fantasy short featuring a sexy woodsman and a fugitive prince. What happens? Not what you're thinking.

Oh my God. This one makes me cringe and if there's some German word for "horrified and shocked and entertained", I need to know it so I can describe this story.

B

This book is marketed as GLBT but it's really good whether you're gay or straight. If you're into gritty stories, if you're into the idea of love and romance being a thousand different things (not all of them happy), snatch this one up when it comes out in March 2015.

~ Lei ~ Reading Is An Adventure ~ says

★★★★? ~ 4 Stars

Very good anthology. Each story was different and unique world-building for such short stories. Some sad, some uplifting, each different in its own way. This was my dabble into this new author to me and I plan to read more.

Thanks for the borrow, Nancy!

Kristie says

I liked this very much. Going into the reading, I really didn't have a good idea of what I was to expect. Anything I had expected was blown out of the water by the second story. Beautiful and tragic, the writing is gorgeous, filled with foreshadowing, and with every story I became more and more involved in the worlds where these characters lived, the trials they faced, and the choices they made.

By the end of the last story it finally hit me that these were all about choices. The ability to choose your own fate. The ability to choose who to love, how to love them, how to defend them, even how to betray them. Choices. We all face them every day of our lives. How we choose to live is as important as living itself. For today, I'm happy I chose to read this book. I'm happy it was a buddy read with a great group of people. I'm elated that the discussions we've had throughout every story have been thoughtful and enlightening. Thank you to my buddy readers at Hassell and Hall.... You're a fantastic group. I'm glad we choose to take this book journey together. And thank you to Kirby Crow for writing such thoughtful and unique stories that will stay with me for a very long time.

Mel says

So, these are all shorts. I first thought they were somehow connected, and they are, just not as I thought they were. I thought these were all set in the same world, but they are not, rather connected by a theme. The theme of choice.

Crank

Life wasn't fair. Bellew knew this, and knew still that it was all the life he had, fair or not. He loved it as fierce as the pretty, fortunate children in the steel towers far away from the pit bosses of the crank mills loved theirs. He just loved it differently.

Bellew's story is brutal. It's amazing how he breaks out of it, though. He's really a mess, but when it counts he acts. He doesn't know what love is, and can articulate it even less, but he saves Roben, because to him he's more important than Bellew himself.

I hope we could have found out more about The Undertaker. The explanations and the world building in general are kinda vague in parts.

Hammer and Bone

In a world full of pain, will you be the one who takes it or gives it? And is it even possible to choose a side?

Hangfire

This one pissed me so off. Argh. Really well written, but (view spoiler)

No Gods and No Tomorrows

Oh God, this one was heaaaaavvvy...

I don't want to be what I am. I don't have any way out but dead, and the old man tells me you guys got notetakers there, too.

It's unbelievable how Kirby Crow could turn around something so hopeless into something... else. But when I think about it, she didn't turn it around into something hopeful. Just because he (view spoiler)

God, what a horrible tale!

Too close to real life, too.

But I liked this. The priest and the old men were splendidly well done. The supernatural vibe, the feeling that you could smell the smoke of hell, invading from the other side...

Decisions, decisions... Never easy. Never a solely good outcome.

Shadow and Starlight

Fuck, I knew this was all too good to be true. Ahhhh :D

Once, I was like that dove in yon tree: calling out for someone to come and . . . I know not. To save me, perhaps; to undo the past and make this [...] all go away.

Oh gosh, the irony of this story, I can't even...

Knights of the Risen God

It's only a noble sacrifice if you choose to die, otherwise it's an execution.

The hints were all right there.

Crowheart

This story was so horrible, it slew me, and I don't even want to talk about it. Gah.

Not everyone in town admired Lily, because not everyone can look in something beautiful and wild and not feel the urge to rush it down somehow, dirty it and make it smaller.

Sundog

This was, while not light and dealing with the heavy topic of abuse by a parent, a hopeful tale. Michel had a choice to make and I think he chose wisely. But what a burden to take. I'm glad he had Ray.

All in all, I really liked this anthology. Kirby is a very talented writer!

***** Buddy Read with folks from Hassel & Hall :-) Aug 3 *****

Laylah says

Good lord, that was lovely. And terrible, and wrenching, and vivid. Kirby Crow has an absolutely luscious command of language, and there are some seriously kicker endings in here. A note for readers who find this through the publishing house: this is *not* a book of romances. It's a series of dark fantasy and horror short stories whose protagonists are queer in one way or another. Not everyone is going to be okay, and not every evil is going to be vanquished. But if you go in with that expectation? mmmf.

I think "Hammer and Bone" the short story, the lone f/f piece in the set, might be one of my favorites in its execution; there's a mystery to it that's never quite solved, and I keep coming back to worry at the ending like a dog with a particularly gristly bone. I love the juxtaposition of the two Southern Gothic pieces, "Crowheart" and "Sundog," at the end of the collection, and the way they handle protagonists in similar circumstances to very different effect. ...I confess I also just really love the descriptions in both of those; happy as I am to live in Seattle, I do miss the lush hot land of the South, the sticky air and overgrown woods.

In a few places I got stuck a bit on things that were elided between scenes -- "Crank" and "Knights of the Risen God" were the ones that bothered me on that front, where the jump between the end of one scene and the start of the next left a gap whose contents weren't entirely clear. (By contrast when this happens in "Shadow and Starlight," it's easy to follow what must have happened in the scene break.)

That's a minor quibble, though, compared to the overall effect of the collection, which is sensual and unsettling and entirely worth a read.

amomentsilence says

4.5 Stars of holy, frigging, what in the gods' names did I read, that was power perfection!

.5 Stars short of true perfection though because there wee a couple stories I wasn't so into, or that I felt fell short of her usual writing splendor. But all in all, what a twisted, dark, revolting tantalizing collection of

stories! Definitely getting me a print copy off this to go on my shelf, ASAP!

will rate and review each story later

Alisa says

This was the most unique book I've read in a long, long time. It was my first time reading this author and I was mesmerized by the end of the first story. There is something both beautiful and haunting in the way this author writes.

This is a collection of short stories and each is dramatically different but they're all really good. These stories are dark in nature and they don't all have happy endings. While there is love in each one I would not categorize them as romances. There is everything from fantasy worlds to a zombie apocalypse to our current world with some magical twists. There are carnivals and evil priests and everything in between.

I would be hard pressed to pick my favorite of the eight stories. They were all so good in their own dark, messed up ways.

Ami says

No rating because I am going to chalk it up to the "me-not-the-book" case.

When I requested the ARC, I didn't really pay attention that it would be a collection of short stories. I admit, I asked only because I loved the cover :p. I guess with this kind of dark/fantasy setting, I couldn't exactly enjoy it as short stories.

I prefer to have significant length so I could be eased into the complexity of the world, the characters, and to enjoy the flow from beginning to end. Oh, and I couldn't count this as romance either, more like dark/fantasy LGBT fiction (because we did have an F/F relationship)

I DID thought the third story, "*Hangfire*" as a punch-in-my-gut ... I still thought about that ending, that twisted ending. Man, that one story was powerful! I gave it a solid 4*.

The ARC is provided by the publisher via Netgalley for an exchange of fair and honest review. No high rating is required for any ARC received.

Lala says

An extra star for the author's creativity in coming up with these stories.

So many different stories..various genres, various settings. Some are romances, some are not at all. They have one trait in common, though - each one packs a hell of an emotional punch.

Crank

This one was my least favorite, mostly because of the confusing world-building. I got lost trying to make sense of it. There was some romance, though..and despite the poor odds, there was maybe just a hint of hope for the heroes. **3 stars.**

Hammer and Bone.

A post-apocalyptic zombie story. F/F, which I didn't care for, but the rest was sufficiently creepy, dark and engaging. **3.5 stars.**

Hangfire.

A contemporary Halloween short with a dash of mystique. Full of sense of foreboding, and when the worst came to pass, it was every bit as heart-breaking as I expected. **4 stars.**

No Gods and No Tomorrows.

A philosophical little piece, where a young urchin tries to get away from his shitty life, but finds out the price he has to pay for it is too steep, and he might just be unwilling to pay it. **4 stars.**

Knights of The Risen Stars.

Two men on a daring, but impossible mission of killing a demon, and one of them has no intentions to die, no matter the cost. Fate favors the prepared, after all. **4.5 stars.**

Shadow ans Starlight.

A story of a fugitive mage prince who has lost all hope and trust in people. He meets a woodsman who might just restore his faith in people...or perhaps not? I have to stop expecting that the stories in this book will go the way I wanted them to go. Violent, gory, bleak - this story was all kinds of depressing. **4.5 stars.**

Crowheart.

Sad from beginning to the end. **:/ 3.5 stars.**

Sundog.

A contemporary short story, with homophobia and overall depressing as hell. I appreciated the HFN ending, though. **3.75 stars.**

This was an awesome collection. Each story (except the first) had a fascinating world-building and I was left

wishing for MORE after reading them. Kudos to the author.

***ARC provided by the publisher via NetGalley. ***

Lotta says

These stories were so dark, and so well thought out. Perfect for multiple readings, as there were many layers. Most stories were all show, no tell, and in the limited scope of each story, the author managed to build worlds and create believable characters.

Maarja says

This is a collection of unconnected short stories, so it's really difficult to rate, because I liked some of the stories more and some less. Overall, though, most of them were quite intriguing, either from the world-building point of view or because of the characters, so 4 stars seems about right. Several of them offered food for thought for a longer time, with the difficult decisions the characters faced and the moral gray areas presented in them. I enjoyed the whole experience even more, thanks to the BR with the Hassell & Hall FB group, where everyone had such interesting and varied points of view and helped me understand some things. The BR discussions can be found here. (only accessible if you're a member of the group)

Beware, though - there are really, really dark things in this book, and not all stories have a happy ending, so I wouldn't read them in a row. What worked for me was reading one per day in-between something fluffy or fun.

Wart Hill says

thinking of preordering the paperback because omg that cover xD

Preordered the paperback <3

Guess what came in the mail when I wasn't paying attention!

You can find this and other reviews at [Things I Find While Shelving](#)

I'm not entirely sure how to disclaim this one. Because there's kind of a story behind how I got it. I was browsing Riptide because I browse Riptide a lot because I love Riptide and can usually find Things I Want (Actually, the reason I joined NetGalley was largely so I could read Riptide titles early and figure which ones I wanted to buy...*shifty eyes*). So. I was browsing Riptide and I saw this gorgeous cover and was like "I want that". So I decided to just go for it and preorder it. I didn't really know what it was about, I really did just buy it for the cover.

Then I was on NetGalley and saw that the ARC was up so I was like "May as well!" read it early and then

know if it's a for me or a wrap and give as a gift kind of book. Then it got archived. Then I took a LONG break from NetGalley (sorry, I still feel like an ass about that...but I needed it). Then I went back to NetGalley and LO AND BEHOLD it was no longer archived. So I was like, sweet!

Then like...a week later there was a lovely package in my mailbox and WOO THE BOOK CAME.

So I didn't read the ARC. But I had an ARC. But I did buy the book.

I hope that clears it up for somebody...not sure it clears it up for me.

SO. BOOK!

OMG BOOK.

There was only one story in this collection that didn't BLOW MY FUCKING MIND and that was the first one. I felt...really no connection to the characters. It wasn't a bad story - very well written, intriguing world, just.. I didn't love it like I did the rest of these stories.

They are all dark, disturbing, twisted. All in different ways. All throw you into different, intriguing, very well built worlds. There is much creepy. There is much O.O WHY DID I READ THAT OH WAIT I WANT MORE WTF?

Seriously. I loved this book.
