

Kendall Reviews (7 Feb 2020)

Here is a quick review for the first novella from The Dark Masters Trilogy.

Let's just get this out the way now.

Whitstable is one of the finest pieces of fiction I've read in any genre.

There, I've said it.

Stephen Volk has written a fictional biography that honours Hammer Horror legend, Peter Cushing. In Whitstable, I recognised the man I saw onscreen but was offered a fascinating insight into his offscreen life. A life that was overwrought with grief for Helen, his wife that has recently passed.

Whilst on a walk, Cushing is asked by a young boy to help him as his mother's boyfriend is a vampire. Not wanting to embarrass the boy Cushing doesn't correct him that he really isn't Van Helsing the famous vampire killer.

The ensuing conversation reveals that the vampire is making regular night visits to the boy's bedroom and it's from this point on that Cushing decides to help.

Volk blends fact and fiction seamlessly. A passage on why Cushing took so many roles, so subtly delivered brought a tear to the eye.

There are two exchanges between Cushing and Les Gledhill (The Boyfriend) that were so tense, I was unaware I'd been holding my breath. Both are brilliant for different reasons. The first is the clash of English gent and thug, expertly written with the swears hitting me as hard as they did Cushing. The second, alternating a conversation in a cinema with action from the big screen was a format I'd never read before and was blown away at how powerful it was.

I want to say so much more, but to do so will spoil what is a masterclass in storytelling.

Even if you know nothing about Peter Cushing, Whitstable still works. His story as captured in this book is utterly captivating, thrilling, heartbreaking and uplifting.

A story about grief and loss, the past and the future, the young and the old, the right and wrong.

A story about hope.

A story about the gentleman Peter Cushing.