



BOOK REVIEW

Book Title	Priest of Bones
Author	Peter McLean
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Stars	

I've struggled to define this book's genre. Some have labelled it a 'crime thriller with a secondary fantasy element', others have compared it to the TV series Peaky Blinders while others have invoked The Godfather. There are comparisons to The Lies of Locke Lamora but this is darker and far more wide-ranging in its world building. For me, the fact I couldn't instantly label it, became one of its best points. This is an original story, full of grimdark elements, but it's the story's narrative voice that makes it stand out so distinctly.

Tomas Piety and his Pious Men have returned from a terrible war, one with implications which filter into this story. The social and political factors are there of course, but more significantly is the PTSD symptoms which these soldiers suffer. And the symptoms burn their way into the characterisations Peter McLean has created. These people are savage, they've been bathed in blood for so long, they know little else. Yet they have consciences too. Violence is used to serve a purpose. The villains of this story are those who have returned from the war *without* their conscience. It's an interesting premise. One that is deepened by the concept of the enemy infiltrating society in more devious and underhand ways, which Tomas and his crew must continue to wage war against.

This is a story about warfare that exists in poverty-riddled streets. Warfare that uses guerrilla tactics to achieve its goals rather than any conventional battle. Therefore, the conflict is episodic, growing in drama as the story progresses. But what I really enjoyed was seeing the growth of Tomas' influence in his hometown, as a businessman/soldier. The expansion of taverns, brothels and casinos that make him wealthy enough to help the down-trodden folk he aims to protect.

The characters are the focal point of the story. We see each one develop, in original and dramatic ways. Bloody Anne's story is full of warmth as Tomas' second-in-command; a lethal killer with an early life filled with tragedy but who finally finds love. Jochan, Tomas' crazed brother, whose childhood is the cause of his drunken and unpredictable behaviour. And, without a doubt, the most enigmatic character in these pages, Billy the Boy. This 12 year old kid carries the only element that stops this being a traditional crime story – he has magical abilities. Or at least, something akin to magic. It's obvious he will play a significant part in the second story, Priest of Lies.

The first person narrative makes Tomas come alive, we're inside his head, listening to his distinctive commentary. A man who is not well educated but who is a leader first and foremost. That voice makes this book stand out and shows what a talent Peter McLean is!