


Speculative Fiction Book Review

Book Title	Mother Pig
Author	Travis M Riddle
Date	May 2021
Stars	

I'm deeply honoured that Travis included a quote from my review of *Flesh Eater* on the cover of *Mother Pig*. My quote states that Travis is the most original fantasy writer in the genre and, after reading *Mother Pig*, I stand by that assertion.

I've needed twenty-four hours to process the story so I can do it justice. The reason is the difference to anything else I've read lately. Until *Mother Pig* reaches its climax, I decided a key word to describe the story was 'gentle'. It may sound a strange choice, bear with me.

The build-up to the climax is a gradual thing, a gentle incline of a narrative. The author's focus remains firmly on establishing the world building and how its characters fit within it. Coal and his newly-acquired team have to acquire artefacts to help the Dirt King overcome a blight which is affecting the world. It causes horrific mutations which Coal and the gang encounter from time to time, generating exciting conflicts and testing the team's abilities.

However, in the first half of the book especially, we are introduced to Coal's new allies and the locations through which they travel to locate these artefacts. If I'm honest, my reaction to the first half was that it was a little slow for my liking. We are shown the backgrounds of the new characters and time is spent investing the reader in their relationships. Plus, as is always the case in a novel by Travis Riddle, everyone spends a lot of time eating! Wasp balls especially, we get to find out how varied the quality of these things can be!

It's this gentle progress which challenged me for a while. My advice is to understand why it's there. To avoid spoilers, I'm not going to comment on the climax beyond saying I have not been so shocked and upset for a long time. There is a point towards the end where I actually gasped out loud! Talk about a twist!! And, the thing is, it works because of the way we're invested in these characters. The shock remains with me now, a day later!

It takes courage to light a slow fuse like this. We're conditioned to read stories where battles, explosions are common ways to sustain tension. It is refreshing to have characters sit around a table in a restaurant to discuss how they're going to face their next challenge! It does not mean the story is dull, far from it. I love how characters such as bats, boars and orangutans, can be turned into rich and diverse people. It is original in its detail, lovingly crafted and with a relaxed narrative style. The set pieces are exciting but innovative (I'm talking to you Horace!) and the characters often adorable (looking at you, Yurzu). As always, I recommend *Mother Pig* for the fact that it is gentle at times, thrilling at others. Travis Riddle continues to break the mould of fantasy storytelling.