



BOOK REVIEW

Book Title	The Aching God
Author	Mike Shel
Date	September 2018
Stars	

'Aching God' is the first of a trilogy and the story reflects that fact. Some reviewers have commented on the slow pace which they've blamed the emphasis on world building. I'm all too aware, as an author of a trilogy, that your first novel is where you sow seeds, where some will germinate later in the series, the good writer disguises this process. Mike Shel does this admirably.

It is most obvious at the end of the novel where the story continues for several chapters after the climax. There's the risk of losing your readers in doing this. The Big Bad has been defeated and we're satisfied that Right has defeated Evil. So why offer anything more? In this novel it's because we're being told we've only touched the surface, beneath this iceberg there's a lot more going on and we need to be hooked in to the next part of the story. Well, consider me hooked!

There's also been suggestions in some reviews that this is a LitRPG story but I disagree. This is a military mission we're following. Of course, you select a team with the kind of skills you need to address the dangers you're likely to face, to do otherwise would be foolhardy and risk the success of the mission. This may be fantasy but it's also reality!

I've been trying to decide what I like best in this story. I'm always a fan of well-defined, interesting characters and this book is full of them. Auric Monteo is a wonderfully complex and damaged protagonist, not your typical hero nor a dark anti-hero either but a man driven to face his demons because he has no other choice. I'm a fan of Belech too, the sturdy, indomitable friend who helps Auric deal with those demons. Best of all, Sira. Belech says about her at one point that she is the strongest but it's not in any conventional way. She is calm, her faith is her foundation and though her abilities give her enormous defensive powers, she is the one who sees them through the worst in many ways. I love female characters that are more than the "bad-ass" type, who retain such complexity that we see them as real women, not fantasy versions of male attraction.

But, in the end, it's the world building that makes the story really hum. It is filled with malevolence, madness and magic. A place where religion has a very real power, where gods appear to exist. It's also a place where the evil of the Djao, an evil race vanquished by these gods, still attracts the nefarious types who want to profit from this race's artefacts. I'm intrigued by the way Mike Shel comments on us, as a race, how we would likely do the same thing. Plundering riches with blatant disregard for the consequences. Just like the stories of how Carter plundered the tomb of King Tutankhamen. We will do anything to make money, to gain power over others, even if the risks appear to be high. I'm hoping to see in the forthcoming stories how these consequences play out.