




BOOK REVIEW

Book Title	Blackwing: The Raven's Mark
Author	Ed McDonald
Date	July 2018
Stars	

This is Grimdark with a heart. It is not the nihilistic style of Grimdark you get from Joe Abercrombie. This is a story where, at its core, its central character has honour, love and a need to protect others. He's told by one of his closest friends near the end of the novel that he's pretended to be mean, vicious, a cold-blooded killer but it's not who he really is.

And that's what makes this story so perfect. In every other way, this is classic Grimdark Fantasy. The world is in ruins from a cataclysm of such epic proportions even the sky is ripped apart and groans. People live in a city on the edge of the Misery, a desert landscape that more than lives up to its name. The city's population live on the edge of survival, it's your typical frontier town where rigid law is maintained with cruelty. There are those who want to believe in the dark gods who live in the Misery and they are hunted and summarily executed by Blackwings like Ryhalt Gilharrow. Except he isn't just some mercenary bounty hunter, he's a tool of a magical Nameless who communicates with him by bringing the tattoo of a raven to life when it rips itself from his arm.

This is a story filled with desperate people out to stay alive, when it means killing others to do so. People who put power before the welfare of others. People who believe in a weapon that will save them from the darkness lurking in the Misery, and whose beliefs are based on a sham. A gritty, dark, cruel and unforgiving Grimdark world.

And it appears Gilharrow is no different. He kills those he hunts without a second's thought. He drinks to excess because there's something in his past he wants to forget. It's turned his anger in on himself so that he values his own life less than anyone else's. But, as the story develops, we find out this isn't the case. He commits himself to a huge debt to a ruthless and unpleasant character to save his friend Nenn's life. He's riddled with remorse when another friend is potentially killed. And, most significantly, despite his best efforts, he is capable of loving another person.

But the reason this is such a perfect book is because not only do we have this enigmatic and complex character, Ed McDonald gives us a story filled with excitement, fuelled with events that put Gilharrow's life in constant danger. The inevitability of a dark calamitous ending looms over closer on the horizon without any sign of stopping its advance.

Suffice to say I read the final 40% of this book in one afternoon/evening. I could not put it down. And I've just bought the sequel. Ed McDonald has redefined Grimdark and done so in an exciting, heart-filled way and I hope he continues to do that for many years to come.