




# BOOK REVIEW

Book Title	<b>The Bone Ships</b>
Author	<b>RJ Barker</b>
Date	<b>August 2019</b>
Stars	

I have never read a fantasy novel quite as original as *The Bone Ships* for a long time. There are few of the conventional tropes in it; magic appears in forms of Nature, dragons are whales and their skeletons are ships. There's also the language of the story that makes it different. A style of narrative that reminds me of Victorian sea-faring tales, especially its dialogue. There's more than a passing reference to *Moby Dick* here but nothing like Herman Melville imagined.

If I'm honest, the opening chapters felt slow. There's little in the way of drama or excitement. What there is, is characterisation and world building which will prove vital for the remainder of the novel – and I suspect the series. It establishes the wonderful relationship our protagonist, Joron Twiner, has with the fearsome woman who becomes his shipwife, or captain, Lucky Meas.

Joron's journey as a character is as lengthy and dramatic as the Tide Child's voyage as it searches for, and tries to protect, the last of the sea dragons. He is a character whose voice is crystal clear throughout the story, he is a traditional Common Man, in many ways. He has the insecurities, the fear, the desire to be something better than he is, that we all share. Under his shipwife's guidance, these negative qualities slowly fade. This is a story about his redemption from a worthless drunk into a man who is going to have a major impact on the sea dragons – and the world that has relied on them for war. The rest of the Tide Child's crew gradually grow and blossom too, thanks to the way Shipwife Meas treats them. It's a book that could be used in leadership and management courses for this reason.

World building is so detailed it takes a while to adapt to the volume of terminology that defines life; shipcraft, cultural beliefs, history, the flora and fauna. As the story develops it immerses us in this new world because of its language. RJ tells me he kept a notebook handy that worked a bit like a dictionary! It's a brave thing – making the reader work in this way, as we inculcate the dozens of terms. But it works so well, it makes the world real.

This is a very different type of book to his *Wounded Kingdom* trilogy. Again, it's a brave writer that does something very different to what has gone before. That said, there are the same ethical considerations, the same strong women, insecure men and ruthless villains. I hope that people won't judge this novel on the basis that it's different to RJ's other stories. That's not fair, they are simply different. And just as stunningly good as ever.



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But this is

such

a good book. Exciting, full of action and suspense, but thought provoking and rich in characterisation and world building. Heartily recommended to all deckchilder everywhere!