



Speculative Fiction Book Review

Book Title	The Great Restoration
Author	William Ray
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Stars	☆☆☆☆☆

William Ray blends genres like a good vintner blends wine. In his first novel in the Verin Empire series, he combined fantasy with a Victorian-esque war genre that I defined as All Quiet on the Western Front with goblins and the undead.

In 'The Great Restoration' Ray blends fantasy with the Victorian detective genre. While some have made the obvious comparison with Conan Doyle, I don't think the association fits. Gus Baston is no Sherlock Holmes, he has no status and operates on the perimeters of society, happier amidst its shadier characters. For me, the analogy works best with Wilkie Collins. His stories centred on corruption and people not being what they seemed, the same is true here. The big difference is that when people aren't what they seem it's because they are goblins, elves and other things.

This combination of styles is so very accurate. Like with so much Victorian literature, you are immersed in a world where Ray's descriptive powers and attention to detail mean you see, smell and taste the world around you. Much of the story takes place in frontier country but there are environmental messages in its setting that I particularly liked. The Elves, who once lived in this land, have left because of humankind's polluting ways. They mine the earth and cover its surface with iron railways, contaminating the air in the process. It leads you to wish the Elves would come back and evict the human race because of their mis-management of the planet. That's what the Great Restoration is about, can the Elves return?

Another element which made me enjoy this story is its characters. Its protagonist is a major character from Gedlund. Gus is someone I liked a lot in that story. When I realised he was the main character in this one, it instantly elevated the story. He's a great character, flawed but with a good heart, courageous but not heroic. He's assisted by the highly assertive Emily who, like Glynn in Gedlund, is a strong, female role who is the one who makes sense of everything. She quickly became another favourite.

I've not mentioned the fantastical elements in the story deliberately because they almost take a backseat to the narrative. Normally, I don't go for such stories, I like my magic to be loud and proud. But William Ray's stories are all about subtlety, no one thing dominates at the expense of other elements. In conclusion, this is a wonderful and imaginative story.

I'll be reviewing the third book in this series, **Shadow Debt**, a fantasy western (!) very shortly. It is a departure once again from the conventional tropes and proves that if William Ray was a vintner, I'd savour his wines with relish!