



Speculative Fiction Book Review

Book Title	Gedlund
Author	William Ray
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Stars	

This is more than a fantasy story. Gedlund opens with an army fighting a guerrilla war against goblins but don't let that deceive you. If you are a history lover, like me, you'll appreciate the attention to detail that permeates the military world building in this story.

We see events through the eyes of a young man, Tam, who encounters battle and all the horrors that go with it within minutes of arriving at his camp. He's hopelessly naïve, slow to assimilate what's happening and stumbles through his first encounter with combat while managing to stay alive. It's a good way to introduce the reader to war. Any war.

The historical component may not be apparent straight away but it's there. It's a variation of war fought at the end of the nineteenth century, with rifles, bayonets and cannon. Throughout the story the reality of this type of warfare is regularly revisited, it's a story of soldiers being sent to places for reasons that are never fully explained, where they're expected to lay down their lives. They do so in the belief they're fighting for honour and patriotism whereas the reality is very different, it's gory, painful and death is always there at your shoulder, waiting. I studied the First World War at length and there were so many times in this story when moments resonated with that conflict for these reasons.

The characters are rich, engaging and vivid. Tam develops as a soldier, his education, intelligence and courage are rewarded with promotions that put him in the centre of the conflicts. Rather than a lowly soldier throughout, his command role allows us to see the ignorance which leads to decisions being taken which cost men their lives. What I love about the best fantasy stories, is when real people are forced to encounter the fantastical. That's what happens here. Yes, the unit's captain turns out to possess magical abilities but otherwise these are normal people trying to find victory amidst the invasion of a land where magic rules, where the dead come to life and where the enemy are almost impossible to defeat.

One other clever ingredient which caught my eye; each chapter uses epistolary to inform or further define the story, primarily from the viewpoint of the investigation into the invasion which happened after the story itself ends. It offers a clever way to conclude events.

The writing is fluid, accomplished and literary in its quality. William Ray has the confidence to indulge in describing events in such detail not only are you transported to the location, you marvel at the manner in which he does it. It is enjoyable for this reason alone.

Look out for my next review of his work: The Great Restoration.