



## Speculative Faction Book Review

Book Title	<b>The Obsidian Path trilogy</b>
Author	<b>Michael R Fletcher</b>
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Stars	

*“A kingdom fell. No, I shouldn’t belittle their efforts just because they fall short of my own accomplishments. An empire fell. People died. A lot of people. Some died peripherally, as a result of my choices. Many died by my own hand. I tore souls from innocent victims to summon and bind creatures. Demons you’d call them.*

*I did terrible, terrible thing trying to do the right thing.”*

When a prologue opens in this way, you know the story is going to go dark. Really dark. Michael R Fletcher does not disappoint in that respect. The violence is visceral. There is a lot of it. But, none of it is sensationalised or unnecessary. It always serves one purpose, to illustrate the agonised depths of internal torture the protagonist, Khraen, must experience. The three novels cover an arc which begins with Khraen’s rebirth, knowing nothing about who he is, to his ultimate destination. (To define this in any more detail involves spoilers). This narrative arc grows larger in scale, involving more and more violence and destruction. And always, Khraen’s anguish at what he’s being forced to do.

The storytelling is exquisite. Told in the first person, we suffer alongside Khraen as he is forced to make others suffer in order to survive and ensure the survival of those he cares for. In this respect he is a good man, made to do terrible thing. Truly terrible things. I’ve never read a story where the character is driven to such dark and terrible depths. Yet what makes us engage with him is his endless regret and soul-searching. He even defines himself as a ‘stained soul’.

The three novels involve a great deal of world building. Khraen travels the globe. Each location is carefully drawn, in the same way that each character he meets is equally well observed. Not easy when there are so many people. Bren remained my favourite. He befriends our anti-hero and becomes Khraen’s conscience. We see the strain it puts on this affable young man too. Khraen’s knowledge demon is another wonderful character, full of wry wit. Fletcher manages to inject humour in these stories at crucial times, to lighten the tone – often before the darkest of moments.

These are stories which stay with you, after the final page. I raced through them, the final books especially (in 24 hours in fact!). They make you think. There is social commentary here as well, the suffering of minority groups for instance. This is why Fletcher’s writing is so special. There is everything here. Nothing is overlooked. This trilogy is a masterclass in writing. As well as a thoughtful and sensitive examination of the human condition.