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BOOK REVIEW

Book Title	The Heresy Within
Author	Rob J Hayes
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Stars	

This is the first novel in the Ties That Bind series and it promises much. On the face of it, the premise is not entirely original; there are magic runes, demons can be summoned from 'the void', there are bad-ass mercenaries, and political shenanigans. This is a grimdark novel without a doubt, but some reviewers have labelled Rob Hayes as an Abercrombie clone. He's not. There's too much magic for it to be Abercrombie-esque for one thing.

I've struggled to identify which I enjoyed this book so much. In the end, I think it's because it is so well-rounded. It is a well-crafted novel.

At it's dark heart lies its three protagonists: Thanquil Darkheart, the Arbiter, Jezzert Val'urn, the Blademaster, and the hideously disfigured mercenary, Black Heart. It's this last character which has generated references to Abercrombie's Logan Ninefingers but this guy isn't a beserker and is fallible. Deep down, like subterranean deep, there is a heart beating in this guy. Perhaps. Jezzert is a wonderfully complex female protagonist, driven by two motivating forces, to fight or fuck. She isn't averse to fucking her way out of a difficult situation. As an Arbiter, tasked with finding and burning to death heretics, Thanquil is just as complex. He's got an obsessive need to steal, has a background that stops him fitting in with his buddy Arbiters and Inquisitors and has the integrity that leads to him being entrusted by the God-Emperor to seek out a huge conspiracy within his peers. His battles are epic since they involve magic runes creating explosive and painful outcomes for all involved.

I enjoyed the world in this book too. Hayes has mastered world-building and created a location filled with mystery and excitement that resonates with factors we recognise from our world. There are hints to the Wilds being set in Africa for instance. Life is harsh for everyone, survival is a constant challenge. Life has little value, unless you're rich and even then it can hang by a thread. The mercenary band we follow for most of the book are vivid portrayals of these elements. Yet, we come to enjoy them, cheering them on as they inflict grievous injuries and gory deaths. Fight scenes are graphic, brutal, visceral. Sexual encounters are notoriously difficult to write by Rob Hayes manages it well, they are also vividly written yet never gratuitously delivered. The language is equally as graphic, some may object to repeated use of the 'c' word but it fits with the characters that utter it.

The pace of the novel is another feature that makes it well-rounded. It's not what I'd call a roller-coaster of action, there are quieter moments for characters and relationships to be defined and the story is better for them. But when action happens, it is big, explosive and no one is safe from its consequences. All in all, a perfectly crafted piece of storytelling.