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Book-Review

The Hidden King – E.G. Radcliff – Review

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Review
The Hidden King
E.G. Radcliffe

Book Information



Title	The Hidden King
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Author	E.G. Radcliff
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Synopsis

***Hidden truths. Hidden power. Hidden destiny.
Someone is going to get burned...***

'On the shores of a rusty sea, in the streets of a starving city, a young man named Áed scraps to build a life for himself and the makeshift family he loves. Scarred by a trauma he cannot remember, and haunted by the brutal damage it left behind, he has no idea of the courage his future will demand.'

When tragedy strikes, a desperate Áed risks a treacherous, life-changing journey in his last chance to save the only family he has left – but an ancient legacy smoldering within him is about to turn deadly. Neither he – nor a kingdom – will ever be the same.'

Just to preface the review, while this wasn't a 'review-request' the author E.G. Radcliff did suggest that this may be a book that I'd like. In fairness I had seen a few reviews of The Hidden King posted on WordPress/Twitter and it's a book that had already caught my eye, not least because of its cover which reminded me a little of the older Shattered Sea Trilogy covers.

Needless to say, regardless of E.G. Radcliff's astute book recommendations and general all-round niceness on Twitter – this will be an honest review.

Review

The synopsis does a very good job of describing to you the plot and it is, in essence, a coming of age, a rags-to-riches story centred around Áed. There is no overarching grand plot and no real pervasive antagonist in *The Hidden King* but what there is, is a deeply emotive journey driven by some beautifully poignant character development.

E.G. Radcliff deftly carries out the most sorrowful sleight of hand in the, almost immediate, switching of Ninian to Áed as main focus/character. It's not something I expected and I was a little shocked, but the mechanic of it is sublime and acts as the perfect catalyst to get Áed and his adoptive ward Ronan's journey started.

The love between Áed, Ronan, and Ninian is evident throughout the book and never feels anything less than genuine. The way they speak to one another and their use of certain words and inflections creates such a believably warm and loving familial unit.

– *“Consider me a reformed man. Hold my hand, love?”*

Áed is very much a person you can root for and his development from cautiously timid street urchin to someone who is far more assured is a journey I think readers of all ages will enjoy. His growth is organic and shaped by past trauma, current grief, and ongoing struggles with his burgeoning power.

For me the standout character was Ronan, he experiences so much sadness but retains such love and positivity. Seeing him – and I say seeing rather than reading because the writing allows you to visualise so easily – living his best life and enjoying the experience of the festival and market in Chapter 12 made me so happy. Literally, I was beaming as I read that chapter it was just so precious.

There's not an expansive cast of characters in *The Hidden King* which is good given the very close character focus of the narrative. They are all written well and play their parts perfectly, each possessing depth and varying degrees of moral ambiguity to create fleshed-out characters.

E.G. Radcliff can certainly write and there are so many beautifully descriptive and emotive passages, not least the opening paragraph which hooked me straight away.

– *Moonlight clung like moisture to the abalone walls of the cave, and the sound of lapping seawater echoed over itself in so many whispers. Ninian's feet disturbed puddles as he walked carefully, one hand outstretched to touch the age-polished wall.*

As I mentioned above it is genuinely so easy to visualise everything in *The Hidden King* thanks to the author's beautiful prose which extends to the characters, not just the environments.

– *As they danced, her hair worked its way loose from under her hat and fell in wispy chestnut curls around her cheeks. The fine hairs that caught the light of the bonfire shone like filaments of gold.*

In terms of world-building, it is evident an enormous amount of thought and research has gone into creating the story. It is very much inspired by Irish mythology which is visible in the names, words, and creatures you'll encounter. This, when done right, is something I love, using existing mythology as a flavour rather than the body of the story, and it's definitely done right here.

The Hidden King has an LGBTQ+ relationship in Áed/Ninian, themes of disability, and a gloriously strong female character in Boudicca, as always it's fantastic to see representation beyond the standard homogeneous cast, prevalent for so long in literature.

As mentioned earlier The Hidden King is more character-driven than action-driven, that for me led to a more slow-burning pace but one that I thoroughly enjoyed. There are still, however, some very intense scenes, some of them exceptionally dark – torture, murder, death. As with everything else the action scenes are written fantastically and so descriptively that I found myself wincing at certain points.

So why not five-stars?

Technically it's probably a cop-out but I wanted more background to the world and to see more of it. While I very much enjoyed the journey I was on, I really wanted to get out at times and explore. There was a definite ache in me to experience more of E.G. Radcliff's world.

My only other minor issue was that the journey from the Maze to the White City felt a little easy, given the fact it's considered almost a mythological place by the denizens of the Maze I thought it would've been a little harder.

But for a couple of very minor points, The Hidden King is a book that I enjoyed thoroughly for its deep character relationships, richly evocative writing, and vibrant world. Now I just have to wait for book two which I am absolutely going to read.

Who would I recommend this to?

YA isn't a genre I have read in quite some time and so given my enjoyment, I can honestly say this is a book all ages will enjoy.

If you like your books to have deep characterisation, a strong focus on family and relationships, plus a mythological twist I can't recommend The Hidden King highly enough. It has all of those wrapped in evocative language and packaged in a surprisingly dark fantasy world.

About the Author

E.G. Radcliff is an incurable writer, lifelong imaginer of worlds, and author of the first-in-series novel The Hidden King. An insatiable reader and researcher with a penchant for all things Celtic and a love of the mysterious and magical, she brings a knowing touch to her young adult fantasy fiction.

She enjoys adventure, reading on the train, and dreams about flying.

She is based in Illinois, USA.