



Dark Vow

Shona Husk

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Jaines Cord plans to kill the man who murdered her husband, even though killing a Bounty Hunter is said to be impossible. One bullet took away her livelihood, her home and her love. One bullet made by her. Fired from the gun she completed for the Arcane Bounty Hunter.

Obsidian wears the scars of disobeying the powerful Arcane Union. He barely escaped with his life and now lives quietly, in a town the lawmen forgot. When Jaines arrives asking too many questions, he's faced with a decision. Help her or run...again. Obsidian knows that if he flees he'll always be looking over his shoulder. His name is one of the first on the Bounty Hunter's death list.

Yet when Obsidian is offered an opportunity to stop the stone taking over his body in exchange for retrieving the gun, he asks Jaines for her help. Now Jaines must choose: a dead man's vengeance or a living man's hope?

65,000 words

Dark Vow Details

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Author : Shona Husk

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From Reader Review Dark Vow for online ebook

Mariachiara says

Trama: Jaines Cord era l'apprendista del marito un esperto fabbro specializzato in armi da fuoco. Aveva una bella vita, nonostante il mondo in cui vive non dia molta libertà alle donne, lei è stata fortunata si è sposata (giovanissima) per amore e suo marito è buono e giusto. Se solo accontentasse il suo desiderio di portarla a vedere almeno una volta una grande città tutto sarebbe perfetto.

Mentre suo marito è via in cerca di lavoro in città, come ogni mese, in paese arriva un cacciatore Arcano. Gli arcani, chiamati così a causa del Dio che li protegge, conoscono e usano la magia e tutti li temono. Questo poi è un cacciatore e il suo lavoro è scovare e uccidere chiunque arcano non accetti o si ribelli allo stato Arcano. Jaines sa che non dovrebbe accettare un lavoro da quest'uomo, ma loro che le offre la tenta e accetta di decorare la canna interna della sua pistola e di forgiargli dei proiettili. Il cacciatore però usa la sua pistola finita per uccidere il marito di Jaines. Lei disstrutta giura di vendicarsi e parte all'inseguimento dell'uomo. Sulla sua strada incontrerà un altro ex arcano che deciderà di aiutarla, con lui scoprirà molte cose sugli arcani e su suo marito che poi non conosceva così bene come credeva. E alla fine raggiunto l'assassino tutto si risolverà con un duello al sole....

La mia opinione: anche in questo caso la scrittura a tratti appare acerba, ma la fantastica ambientazione unita ad idee molto nuove ed interessante non lo fa notare tanto se non nei dialoghi, piuttosto semplicistici a tratti, e nei ritratti dei personaggi, anche qui appena abbozzati. Più introspezione psicologica. più approfondimento avrebbe reso questo un gran bel libro. Già la trama da sola, nonostante la sua semplicità, vale da sola la pena di leggerlo, perchè nonostante la sua linearità, riesce a catturare il lettore. A volte sono proprio le cose più semplici a funzionare meglio.

Jaines è un personaggio interessantissimo se solo fosse stato approfondito. La sua vita era così semplice e bella ma lei non se rende conto finchè non perde tutto. E solo durante il viaggio di vendetta che intraprende si rende anche conto della sua ignoranza rispetto al mondo al di fuori del suo paese e riguardo all'amore. Si era sposata sedicenne e scoprirà che suo marito le nascondeva molto. Obsidian l'arcano che l'aiuta le insegnerà cosa sia il vero amore e lei dovrà decidere se morire per la sua vendetta o vivere per diventare la speranza di quell'uomo....

Trama affascinante, personaggi affascinanti, basti dire che Obsidian ha il potere di guarire e di cacciare, ma su di lui grava un incantesimo che lo trasforma un po' alla volta in pietra ogni volta che cura qualcuno.....

L'ambientazione poi è unica. abbiamo un west steampunk con carrozze meccaniche, cavalli demoniaci e una strana religione che si basa su dieci divinità, una società maschilista, luce elettrica creata succhiando la magia dalle donne, e due fazioni di Arcani che stanno per far scoppiare una guerra civile tra Nord e Sud..... Gli darei 8 per la trama ma lo stile così minimalista mi frena, mi limito ad un sette e mezzo.

Tara Chevestt says

Wow!!! I don't normally read anything that falls into sci-fi or fantasy genres, but the premise of this grabbed my attention.. A woman in a somewhat western/fantasy world works as a gunsmithy and when a bullet made by her is used to kill her husband, she vows revenge.

The world is somewhat hard to explain in a review.. It's a rugged world full of horseless buggies and guns and farming. Thus, the western feel. But there's also ten different gods over different trades (for men only.. hrmph.) such as mining, farming, and there's a bad god, the god of everything unexplained and magic, the Arcane.

The Arcane sends a bounty hunter to kill her husband. Why? She only did some engraving and made some bullets... Regardless, she's got a dead husband and as a woman, she can't get licensed to be a gunsmith herself so she's got two choices: become a whore/kept woman or move on and do her thing. She chooses...

To read full review, follow the link:

<http://www.bookbabe.blogspot.com/2011/...>

Sandra says

ARC provided by Carina Press on NetGalley!

I really liked this book. It's set in a slightly magical Wild West sort of world, where men follow one of the ten Lords according to their chosen profession. The only people who don't get a choice are women (who follow their husbands Lord) and the Arcane, who are gifted by the Arcane Lord with magic and forced to join the Union. Rogue's are hunted down and killed.

The world building was thorough without an info dump. I always prefer when an author lets the world unfold on its own, and that's what happened in this story. The 'Lords' were slightly unclear initially, but Lance's funeral gave a good excuse for the religious explanation within the ceremony. The story is set with Jaines doing an engraving for an Arcane Bounty Hunter (even though Lance told her *never* to deal with them) and then said Bountier Hunter uses said gun to kill Lance. You could really feel Jaines' pain and grieving, as she makes a vow to avenge her husband by killing the Bounty Hunter.

This obviously isn't as easy as it sound. The Arcane are impervious to bullets and the only way to kill them is hanging, and that's besides the fact that he has a month lead on her and she has no idea where to start. In her journey she crosses paths with Obsidian, a Rogue Arcane who agrees to help her. Obviously feelings bloom, and Husk does a good job of making this realistic and not feel rushed. But I didn't really like how they made it seem like she couldn't love Obsidian and Lance at the same time. There are some things she learns that make her question whether Lance truly loved her, but that doesn't change the fact that she loved him, and I feel like that was sort of dismissed.

Anyway, there were several good twists and turns. I teared up, I shook with rage and betrayal, I was definitely sucked in. The ending was wrapped up nicely but still left open the possibility for a second novel, which I think would be awesome. (view spoiler)

Lee says

The romance felt a bit fast/abrupt, but the world, story, and prose were fantastic.

Home. Love. Books. says

To read this review and more like it please check out my site www.ufreviews.com

I received this book from Net Galley in exchange for an honest review. I really liked the premise of this book

for one simple reason, it's about someone who was out seeking to get revenge and ends up having to decide if revenge is worth getting.

Jaines is a really interesting and intriguing character for a lot of reasons. Her husband and her worked as Smiths in the book and although warned by her husband that working for Arcane's is a bad idea she does it anyway. This one decision leaves her plagued by guilt, because she made the weapon used to kill the man she loved. I think the guilt she had about the role she played in her husband's death to be the driving factor in her quest to get justice. It's really interesting to watch the story unfold. In addition to that it was easy to really feel for Jaines early on in the book. I felt like I had a good grasp on who Jaines was as a character so it was easy to both like her as well as connect with her.

The world building and concepts introduced throughout this novel are very interesting and unique. I really liked the way she separated people through their work. Every person has a skill/trade and that is essentially their identity. Unfortunately women don't get to choose, they just take on their husband's skill. This system also helps to explain the way Jaines is as a person. Another unique concept was the concept of Obsidian turning into stone. Obsidian used to be Bounty Hunter, but now he is the one being hunted. He has his magic to aid him but using it now results in turning himself slowly into stone. This definitely makes for an interesting plot development, as Obsidian must think before he acts.

The one big problem I had with the book was that it felt rushed. This book was on the short side at only 65,000 words and this is a problem I often run into when reading a book of this length. There just isn't enough time to let things develop organically and often times the book reads as rushed. I don't feel that the plot was really rushed, but rather that the relationship between Jaines and Obsidian was. From early on in the book you know Jaines loved her husband and she was devastated by his death, after all it is the event that causes the entire book to take place. But in a very short period of time after his death she meets and falls in love with Obsidian. This whole relationship did not feel organic and in a lot of ways felt like it was pushed upon them. I think their relationship could have worked or read as an organic progression if the book had been longer, but alas it wasn't.

Overall though this was a good book. I enjoyed the writing, it was easy to understand, I was seldom confused, and I really did like the plot. I would recommend this book to anyone in the mood for a short but enjoyable book to read.

Marlene says

Dark Vow by Shona Husk was an interesting kind of genre-bending romance. Emphasis more on the genre-bender than the romance. The world-building was really kind of neat, a sort of post-apocalyptic Western. It reminded me a little of a polytheistic Firefly, except with hellsteeds instead of starships. Whoa! I just had a vision of Mal Reynolds from Firefly riding Death's horse Binky from the Discworld. And it might fit.

The world of Dark Vow is definitely a post-apocalyptic Earth. Someone's grandmother remembers when the horses were really horses. Now they have a taste for human blood. The central character of Dark Vow is Jaines Cord. She is a gunsmith. Or rather, she would be, if women were allowed to be master smiths. Or master anything. Since Jaines is a female, the highest grade she can attain is apprentice, with her husband overseeing her work as the master smith. But as the story opens, her husband Lance is away on a buying trip, and Jaines is handling the gunsmithy.

An Arcane Hunter comes to Jaines' smithy with an order for her to add certain runes to his gun. Two smiths have already worked on this gun, a woodsmith and a metalsmith. Jaines' specialty is engraving: only she can

add these runes to the gun. And the Arcane Bounty Hunter may have phrased his order as a request, but members of the Arcane have magical powers, and certainly earthly ones. If she doesn't do what he wants, he can kill her and he will not suffer any consequences.

Her husband has always warned her not to deal with any Arcanes, but Jaines feels she has no choice. She is literally damned if she does, and damned if she doesn't. At least if she does the work, she will earn enough money to pay off their debts.

The work is challenging, but also eerie. When the gun is complete, she can feel its hunger to be used, to kill. Unlike most weapons she makes, she does not test-fire it. The Arcane Hunter returns to pick up his weapon, pays her, and leaves.

Jaines never gets the chance to tell her husband Lance Cord about the commission from the Arcane Bounty Hunter. The evening that her husband returns, the Bounty Hunter bursts into their house and test-fires the weapon on her husband. Jaines is a widow, and it is all her fault. At her husband's funeral, she makes a vow to his spirit that she will hunt down the Arcane Hunter and kill him. She does not expect to survive, and she doesn't care.

Jaines begins her journey in the middle of the night. She leaves behind the life she has known for the past eight years. With each mile she travels away from her home, she loses her illusions about the life she has led, and about the husband that she loved. The Jaines that emerges from that forge is a very different woman from the one who goes in. She's worth meeting.

Escape Rating B+: Jaines' personality is what carries this book. She was someone I wanted to meet, so I enjoyed spending time with her. That made the book for me. This is a fascinating world. I wanted to find out how things got to where they are, and so quickly! If someone's grandmother remembers our type of horses, what the heck happened? And what happens next? The greater story does end on a cliffhanger, and I want to know!

The world-building was good, the science fiction and/or fantasy of it worked for me. This is one of those books where I'm not exactly sure which one it is, and I don't care. It's speculative fiction in the big tent sense, and that's good enough. The romance aspects I had a little bit of trouble with. I understood why Obsidian fell in love with Jaines. She's the heroine, and her character is pretty clearly drawn. She's holding up really well in a lot of adversity. She's not just tough, but she's growing even with all the pressure.

I could get why Jaines might fall into bed, or bedroll, with Obsidian. But we don't see enough of his character to know why she'd fall in love with him, especially that fast. Her willingness to trust anyone was probably a little shaky at that point. And Obsidian doesn't exactly put his best foot, face or hand forward. For good reasons of his own, he lies about himself, a lot, and for quite a while into their acquaintance. Just not quite as much as her husband did. But still, one after the other, I'm not sure that's a foundation for love, at least not that quickly.

But I chose this book because I'd read some great things about Shona Husk's work. And I'm very glad I did.

Alison says

I'm not a great fan of stories that have women as an inferior gender, and the general population that finds this normal and accepting. Normally there is someone who objects, who wants to stand up for woman's rights. But in Dark Vow this is just the way of it; a woman can't work unless she's sponsored by a man, either her

husband or father. No one can work unless they're members of the union, and women can't be members of the union because their only real purpose is to marry and breed. I found it incredibly strange that in this world there was no one fighting the status quo, not even our protagonist, who suddenly finds herself unable to work after her husband is shot dead.

As annoying and distasteful as this is to the feminist in me, it actually fit into the story. This is not a dystopian world; this is a world that has a very different set of values and ways of working than we have. To enjoy this story I had to set my own preconceived notions, no matter how right they are, aside.

The idea behind the story is actually a pretty interesting read. Jaines Cord is a gunsmith and engraver, her husband is away for a few days on business, she takes a commission for a magical bounty hunter. The bounty hunter comes back and 'tests' that the gun works, killing her husband. Jaines is now in a position where she can't continue to work, and really just wants to seek vengeance, to kill the unkillable bounty hunter; so that's what she sets out to do. She then means Obsidian, cursed magician and outlaw.

There are some fantastic twists in Dark Vow, and it's the unveiling of the layers of intrigue that really keep the pages turning. The characters are enjoyable, and the story is heart-wrenching in places, but they're also repetitive. I forgot to count how often Jaines mentioned that she didn't want to use the blood money the bounty hunter gave her when he killed her husband. Or that her husband is dead. And after repeating this constantly for the first half of the book, suddenly she finds herself with feelings for Obsidian?

Obsidian is a great character, he's got that whole dark mysterious past thing happening, he's a good guy that's hunted as a bad guy. And he's witty, charming and just darn amusing.

Dark Vow is a strangely addictive story, despite the issues I had with the plot construct and some of the repetitive whines. It leads well into the next book, without giving us a huge cliff hanger, so definitely an author to keep your eye on.

Dinjolina says

Look at the pretty cover.
I mean, look at it!
And the blurb!

I had to get this book!
And I did, via NetGalley.

It was a superbly written and it showed how much imagination the author had.

But does my review still sound dull to you?

It does. Why? Because the book left me cold. I could not make myself interested. I wanted to get in to the world, but couldn't. Instead of reading on my kindle I watched clouds outside pretending to read...

It is fine and dandy to pretend-read when it comes to studying and droll paperwork. It is an other thing to woolgather when reading something that was supposed to entertain you.

If I had to put my finger on the problem....I don't think I could. It just was not my cup of tea.

Dani C says

Although it took me a while to initially get properly into the novel, I ended up being completely hooked by the story. I think the main reason that it was quite difficult to get into is because it's set in an entirely different world to our own, so there is obviously a lot to try to learn and understand at the beginning, such as the different lords and the significance of the Arcane. Once I'd gotten used to the premise of the novel however, I didn't want to put it down!

Jaines is a really wonderful protagonist - her character is so deep, complex and real that I found myself sympathising with her almost immediately - before the plot had even begun to make proper sense to me. She worked really well as the protagonist, and without her the novel wouldn't have worked properly at all - I was able to feel everything with her - including her attraction to the rugged Obsidian.

The blossoming romance between Jaines and Obsidian was possibly the part of the story that I enjoyed the most (even though romance in a novel is usually the element that I like to accompany the rest of the novel, rather than be the central point). I think I enjoyed it the most simply because Jaines' relationship with Obsidian is what unlocked the rest of the secrets in the novel and bought about the incredible plot twists that litter the novel most of the way through - and these plot twists were so exciting! Although the final twist was something I'd predicted earlier on in the novel, this didn't detract from the experience of it when it was finally revealed (it still had my heart thumping!).

The premise and plot of the novel was entirely unique from anything else I've ever read, which makes it an even more special read to me. At the beginning of the novel Jaines is married to who she believes to be Lance Cord, a man who lives his life serving as a Smithy under the Smith lord (one of the 10 lords who represent various skills). But when an Arcane Bounty Hunter arrives, she is left with no other choice but to create the gun he asks for, which in its turn leads to her husband's death. This is when Jaines begins her journey for revenge that leads her into the arms of Obsidian, a man she initially believes she should hate by association, but slowly begins to love.

The end of the novel is left wide open for the follow-up in the series, which I'm hoping we won't have to wait too long for - I'm dying to know what will happen between the Arcane Union and the Free Arcane Association - and you will be too once you've finished reading!

This is a novel I highly recommend to any lovers of Fantasy/Science Fiction or even Romance - it definitely has a little of something for everyone. I know you'll fall in love with it too!

Jacob Proffitt says

Dark Vow is a romance set in a unique fantasy setting. The gods of the world are the ten Lords. Each Lord represents a profession that is organized into a formal union. Faith in the ten Lords is universal and built into

both society and law. Union membership is also built into the law, including the ineligibility of women to join. That leaves women completely dependent on men for anything but the most menial work—backed by the full force of law. So when Jaines' husband, Lance, is killed, she loses both husband and profession (she is a noted gunsmith) and finds herself prey to the village leech.

The thing is, I don't think the book needed so very grim a background. The unions were clearly a problem and their tyranny was on full display throughout the book. The added formal, legally-enforced misogyny on top of it was just that smidgeon too much and the story suffered for it. It's like the author wanted to be *sure* that we would know that the unions were *evil* so she included stripping women of all possible professions to leave them at the prey of the most despicable of men. The end effect is actually to dilute the true evil of those who would use the combination of union and faith to create a de facto slavery that is both more universally threatening and more important to the story, I think.

So I had a hard time with elements of the plot, but it's still a romance, right? Woman loses her husband, but finds true love with a man who more fully suits her. There's real potential there. Unfortunately, I just didn't feel the romance in this book. I think Jaines ended up too compartmentalized, for me. Her feelings for Obsidian seemed... disconnected, somehow, from the rest of her life. There was no feeling of attachment, probably because there was very little there for her to attach to. I never really got a sense of depth from Obsidian, no sense of struggle or triumph or real feeling for Jaines. I mean, he said the right things. And he did the right things... mostly. But it all came across as kind of superficial.

Here's what saved the book for me: I liked Jaines. A lot. She had gumption. And grit. So when she vows to kill the man responsible for her husband's death, well, you believed that she would give it a very credible shot. Indeed, the plot of the book accounts for almost all of my attachment to it. I wanted to see how Jaines planned on finding the man and how she planned on overcoming his magical defenses—even if those plans didn't work out in the end (I'm not saying they did or didn't. This isn't a spoiler. I'm just saying that I was along for the ride whatever the outcome). Jaines was smart, driven, and capable and the odds were so very much stacked against her but without being so overwhelming as to leave no chance of success.

In the end, I liked the book well enough. I wish the romance had been more fulfilling. And there were elements of the world that I thought were over the top. But it was still a fun read and worth the price of admission.

Rhianna says

Might be my favorite romance of the year!

Her husband always told her not to work for the Arcane and Jaines Cord should have listened. But how could she refuse to work for the Arcane Bounty Hunter who came looking for a skilled smith? A single bullet fired from the very gun she completed for him took her husband and now she's set on making him accountable. An impossible task that will change her life if the Bounty Hunter doesn't kill her too.

When Jaines finds herself stranded in a backwater town in need of someone who can track the Bounty Hunter she meets Obsidian, a man cursed with a stone hand as a result of crossing the Arcane Union. His secrets run as deep as his scars but he's willing to help Jaines to save his own skin. Their winding path and the dangerous journey will force Jaines to know the truth about the world of the Arcane, the man she is trying to avenge, and the ability to love again.

Few authors can pull threads from several genres and weave them together as deftly as Shona Husk has done

in DARK VOW. While set in a world that feels like the old west, a social system of sorts divides the people by the Lord they follow. The Hunter. The Smith. The Brewer. The Mason and so on and so forth. Only one possesses magic and those who fall into that class are ruthless, feared, and with good reason. The Arcane have done things that have damaged the world and have dark secrets few outside their ranks know. Through the entire story the feeling of tension was palpable in every page.

Jaines and Obsidian are amazing characters. Few writers bring such richly damaged and human characters to life without making them brooding or whiny. I honestly cannot recall another book to date where I was wishing as hard for the hero and heroine to be together, to find peace as one. Their interactions made me laugh and made me cry (literally!) and in the end I was left with a satisfaction only a small handful of romance authors can wring from me. This is an adventure story first and a romance second but the two are so well blended and happen so naturally I just can't sing this book's praises enough.

If you enjoy fantasy romance with unusual blended elements (such as steampunk romance) look no further than DARK VOW. Fans of Firefly will love the western-esque flair and Obsidian's anti-hero persona. If you love a strong heroine who can still ask a man for help Jaines is a multi-layered and truly likable heroine. Husk has the talent of Meljean Brook with a voice that is all her own. I'm adding her to my list of must-have authors. Simply put, I loved this book and will be recommending it to everyone who will let me.

Jess the Romanceaholic says

Just realized I never actually posted the review here. Oops!

This is a Quickie Review. For the full review, please visit [The Romanceaholic](#).

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Series Best Read In Order: N/A

Steam Level: Warm

Believe it or not, I think the main thing that kept this story from getting a 4.5 or 5-star rating from me was the romance. I never thought I'd say that, but in this case, it's kind of true.

Well, okay, that isn't completely fair. I loved both Obsidian and Jaines, and I think they were absolutely perfect for each other. However, the distinct lack of sensuality combined with the whirlwind nature of their romance made it hard for me to really feel connected to the budding relationship between them. With her so recently widowed and mired in guilt, it was understandable that she might be looking for a distraction, and of course Obsidian's obvious interest in her as a woman would flatter someone who'd long believed they were rather undesirable, but in the end, while I could certainly believe that there was affection growing between the two of them, I wasn't quite buying the ILY's so quickly.

Regardless of how I felt about the speed of the relationship between Obsidian and Jaines, I absolutely adored the world that Ms. Husk has created, and if and when there is a sequel available, you can be absolutely certain that I will snap it up with a quickness. According to the author, this is currently labeled as a standalone title, but she has plans to write more books set in this world, which has me incredibly excited.

In the end, despite my discomfort with the whirlwind romance, this book is easily going on my keeper's shelf, and I sincerely hope that Ms. Husk continues to explore this fascinating world with future novels (and that she doesn't keep us waiting too terribly long).

An incredibly solid 4/5 Stars.

Tracy says

Too Dry for Me

She was never supposed to do it. Jaines Cord should have very politely refused any orders for the Arcane Bounty Hunter. They were too dangerous. Too deadly. It is harder to refuse, though, when the dangerous male is standing right in front of her in the gun smithy she works with her husband. Even so, the Bounty Hunter's request for a very special engraving on a gun with a very evil feel chills Jaines to the core.

Too nervous to decline, and too mindful of the coin the order will bring, she does the engraving on that death pistol, etches it with magic that hums under her fingertips. Then she loads it with the bullets she's made. Once done, she only wants to see it and the Bounty Hunter gone.

He doesn't stay gone for long, though, and upon his return, Jaines learns the true price of her brush with the Arcane Bounty Hunter...at the sharp retort of the gun that Jaines had engraved and with the bullets that she had made.

Devastated by loss, consumed by regret, she vows to hunt down the Bounty Hunter and do to him what he did to her husband. But she can't do it alone, and when she meets Obsidian, the only man still alive who can help her, she does what she can to convince him to try.

Their journey will be dangerous, and along the way Jaines will find out more about the world she inhabits and the woman she is than she'd ever imagined. At her fingertips is the chance for a forever and a life she'd never dreamed with a man who could be everything. If they live long enough to grasp for it.

~*~

Husk impressed me here with a completely original read set in a unique and imaginative - if grim - world. I don't often come across books that just aren't like anything else I've ever read before. This one is. It read almost like a cross between post-apocalyptic science fiction, fantasy, and historical western. An odd combination, but it worked for this story.

I wish the main character and the narrative had held equal appeal. The telling of the story, from Jaines' perspective in first person point of view, seemed a very dry and often emotionless rendering of events. She certainly has reason to be emotionally damaged after losing her husband, so part of the problem may have been that, but even after some of the grief is processed, Jaines never really emotes well enough for me to connect to her on an emotional level and I never really felt anything deeper than a shallow empathy for her struggles and story.

Obsidian, on the other hand, was great. I liked him. But he didn't show up in the story until almost the 40% mark in the book. Once he did, several good things happened in relation to the story and Jaines' character that made for a more engaging read, but that's a large portion of the book to be alone in Jaines' head with nothing to focus on beyond her thoughts and experiences as she relates them.

I did like Obsidian and Jaines working together in the story, though. I just don't think Obsidian had the character depth he needed for me to be able to embrace him as the male romantic lead. He worked much better for me as a secondary character as Jaines' partner. Then again, the alleged romance between him and Jaines didn't work for me on any level or at any point, and I'm sure that's part of the reason why.

Because of the lack of emotional inflection in Jaines character, I struggled with every story element that related to her feelings, even her vow to avenge her husband, even the rage and disillusionment she says she feels as truths come to light later in the story. I kept feeling like I was being told she felt things, but couldn't quite believe it given the passionless narrative.

The story itself, though, the plot of the book, was solid and imaginative. The world was unique. It's a dry and grim world and women sure aren't considered equal citizens among the general populace, but it would work really well as the backdrop for a series. I'm not sure if it's intended to become one, though. I'm also not sure I'd want to continue in it if it were, especially if there weren't some significant changes in Jaines' narration or didn't have a different narrator entirely. She's just too dry for me.

That fact, and the complete fail of the romance, is what most limited my full enjoyment of this read. The solidness of the story and the uniqueness in the world and mythos just couldn't balance out those two issues enough for this to be more than an okay read for me.

***Disclosure:** An ARC of this book was provided to me by Carina Press via NetGalley. This rating, review, and all included thoughts and comments are my own.*

~*~*~*~

Reviewed for One Good Book Deserves Another.

Jen Davis says

I'll say this about *Dark Vow*, it's definitely not like anything else I've read. The world is led by 10 Lords of various skills (such as Warrior, Carpenter, Hunter, etc.) Each man answers to a specific Lord, learns that skill and builds his life around it. A woman takes her husband's Lord.

Jaines is married to a man who follows the Smith. She and Lance work together in their gun smithy, creating weapons and ammunition for their small community. Lance is out of town when a Bounty Hunter enters the shop, wanting Jaines to engrave his gun. Bounty Hunters follow the Arcane Lord. They manipulate magic. And Lance has always told Jaines to stay away from the Arcane. But the Bounty Hunter offers her so much money and inflames her pride enough that she takes the job.

It quickly becomes apparent that with her contribution, she has turned the gun into a magical weapon... the only one that can kill an Arcane. But the deed is done. Unfortunately, when Lance returns, the Hunter shows up at their home and uses the weapon to kill her husband. With Lance's death, Jaines begins her quest to find the Bounty Hunter again and have her vengeance.

In her journey, she meets Obsidian, a man with intimate knowledge of the Arcane. With him, she learns just how sheltered she has been. She is exposed to some really hard truths about the world and her own life.

I found that I really did like the book. The world building was easy to understand and Jaines was a relatable character with some pretty solid motivation. I felt her grief and her need to avenge her husband. And as she started to develop an attraction toward Obsidian, I could see that too. They have good chemistry. However, I did have trouble with how fast their relationship turned into "love" and how it ended up casting her feelings

for Lance in a less valuable light. Maybe with more time, I could have gotten on board with the depths of their feelings. But as it was, it didn't entirely ring true.

I'm still glad I read it. It was a good change of pace and an interesting story... kind of hard to categorize (maybe alternate history/ fantasy?) -- but good, even if it doesn't fit into a neat little box. Almost 4 stars.

**ARC Provided by NetGalley*

Melindeeloo says

(3.5 stars = I liked it) Dark Vow had a really great but sad hook. Jaines, who is apprentice to her blacksmith husband, ignores his rule to never serve an Arcane customer and the gun she works on and the bullets she makes for it are later used to kill her husband. Grief and guilt move Jaines to vow to hunt down and kill the unkillable Arcane Hunter responsible.

Dark Vow initially caught my interest because from the description it looked to be a steampunk novel, what it turned out to be instead was a first person story that was an interesting mix of fantasy 'romance' with magic in a world with an Old West feel. Husk's world building is really well done so this fusion really worked.

Jaines story really falls into two parts, the story of what leads her to her quest for vengeance including the early part of her search for the killer, and the second part where she is aided in her hunt by a rogue Arcane, Obsidian, who defied the Arcane Guild and ended up 'spelled' so that if he uses his healing power, more and more of his body will turn to stone. I liked both parts of the story and really liked Obsidian and his very interesting backstory, and being a romantic, I wanted Jaines to end up with the intriguing outcast.

However when looking at Dark Vows as the sum its parts, the transition between the two pieces of the story are just too quick within the time frame of the story. Jaines loves her husband at the beginning and loves Obsidian at the end, but it just feels too soon given the extent of her initial grief and the short time since her husband's death. Husk does try to give Jaines the motivation for the transition: events unfold that make Jaines question whether her husband really loved her, but actually that doesn't really matter – what matters is what Jaines felt.

Even with that one flaw, I still enjoyed Dark Vow, the ending leaves open the possibility for Husk to revisit this world and I wouldn't mind another journey there.

ARC provided by Carina Press via Netgalley
