



The Damned

Tarn Richardson

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1914. The outbreak of war. In the French city of Arras, a Father is brutally murdered. The Catholic Inquisition - still powerful, but now working in the shadows - sends its most determined and unhinged of Inquisitors, Poldek Tacit to investigate: his mission to protect the Church from those who would seek to undermine it, no matter what the cost.

Yet as Tacit arrives, armed forces led by Britain and Germany confront each other across No Man's Land. As the Inquisitor strives in vain to establish the truth behind the murder and to uncover the motives of other Vatican servants seeking to undermine him, a beautiful and spirited woman, Sandrine, warns British soldier Henry Frost of a mutual foe even more terrible lurking beneath the killing fields that answers to no human force and wreaks their havoc by the light of the moon. Faced with impossible odds and his own demons, Tacit must battle the forces of evil, and a church determined at all costs to achieve its aims, to reach the heart of a dark conspiracy that seeks to engulf the world, plunging it ever deeper into conflict.

Morally complex and fast paced, this is a gripping work of dark fiction set in an alternative twentieth century, where humanity's desire for love, compassion and peace face daunting challenges in a world overwhelmed by total war and mysterious dark forces.

The Damned Details

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Author : Tarn Richardson

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From Reader Review The Damned for online ebook

Simon Gosden says

Now this is really damned good. A real page turner of a novel, a first world war historical yarn mashed with a supernatural and occult horror novel. Poldek Tacit is an Inquisitor, a huge man tortured by his past but he is sent to Arras in 1914 to investigate a murder. What he uncovers threatens everything he holds dear. Poldek is an amazing hero, a bit like Solomon Kane in many respects. The plotting is sharp, the characterisation and the historical attention to detail is superb. This comes highly recommended by me.

Janel says

I found the synopsis of this book so interesting, and I love the cover – the cross, the soldiers marching and the wolf howling – but I had no idea just how much I would love the story gracing the pages. Easily one of my top books of the year! Prior to reading this book, I wasn't familiar with the term "dark fiction" but, oh my, has Richardson set the standard – dark fiction shares many elements with horror fiction, but it doesn't fall within the realm of standard horror as it is less preoccupied with 'scaring' – instead, it has strong themes of fear, death and examines the darker side of human nature. And those are the themes running through The Damned, alongside a 100% believable fantasy element, I'm talking werewolves and demons!

I had no pre-set expectations when I picked up this book, and I don't want to relay the plot to you because knowing only what the blurb tells you will allow you to get maximum enjoyment from this novel. So, I'll just say, one storyline of the British on the frontline in World War I, the men in the trenches, and a second storyline of the Catholic Church wanting to protect their secrets at all costs – the way these two storylines merged was brilliant; with every page I turned, I was drawn deeper into this plot.

The character creation in this novel was everything I could hope for, I visualised all the characters as real people. The main protagonist, Tacit, was a fantastic character, carrying scars from early childhood, scarred again as adult, you could just feel within him a whirlwind of emotions behind everything he did. Interspersed throughout the most up-to-date narrative, set in 1914, we get the history of Tacit, how he came to be an Inquisitor and it's these insights that make you warm to his character, even though he doesn't appear the friendliest of men. Seeing the development of the relationship between Tacit and Isabella (sent by the church to assess Tacit's faith and loyalty) over the course of the novel was a joy to read.

And, Sandrine was perhaps the most fascinating character of all, warning everyone to lock their doors by nightfall or they may not get to see the sun rise the next morning, and she, too, is carrying secrets.

The fantasy elements were so well incorporated into this plot, it's not often I read a book featuring werewolves, but this is certainly how they should be written. Dark, emotive, thrilling and engaging! I was completely blown away by this book – Tarn Richardson, I didn't know your name before but it's one I certainly won't forget now!

Likely, due to the strong presence of the Catholic Church and the Vatican, thoughts of Dan Brown came to mind while I was reading, but this is firmly Richardson's novel, the writing and the plot his own, holding my full attention throughout, emotionally involving me in the plot and leaving me sad when I finished the book. Luckily, this is a trilogy and I have purchased book 2, The Fallen, already!

Don't you just love when a book you haven't heard of turns out to be one you won't forget!?! I'm indebted

to Ninja Book Box for sending this indie book my way, it's one of my favourite books of the year!

Paul Malone says

Absolutely awesome book. It covers so many genres to describe as just a Horror book is quite misleading. It is very character led and weaves through a number of narratives effortlessly. The author takes you through a journey of discovery and the beauty of the book is that there is hardly a character or story line introduced you do not want to find out more about.

It is set in the first world war as a historical backdrop, and you really get a feel for what life was like in the trenches. This feeds wonderfully into the main story of honour, redemption, loyalty and the feeling that each character must play a part that was already pre ordained (and they know it)

So if you like historical fiction, fantasy, horror or just a great thriller this book is a must. Cannot wait for the sequel. Totally unique and the best read I have read in a long time.

Cal Moriarty says

Visceral fantasy writing at its best! Can't wait to read the rest of Tacit's adventures.

Lör K. says

Many thanks to Tarn Richardson for sending me a free copy of The Damned because I loved The Hunted so much. This is no way affected my review of the book in any way or form.

I read *The Hunted* free eBook on Kindle a while ago, and didn't really enjoy it. I explained why I didn't enjoy it, and Richardson had the kind heart to comment on my review and explain why he had the story go as it was. Thankfully, after a reread with this knowledge in mind, I found that my review went from 2.4 stars out of five to four out of stars. After another reread it became five out of five, and I was completely enraptured with Tacit and the alternative universe that Richardson had created.

When Richardson offered to send me a copy, I was thrilled, and started reading it immediately. Unfortunately, it has been slow going – mainly because this is one of those books I love so much, I just don't want to read it. I don't want it to be over. There's another two books in *The Darkest Hand* series, but honestly I feel a part of my heart break every time I make progress.

Finally, I settled down and managed to read a large amount of it all, and finally settled down with the main intention to finish it so I can delve more into *The Darkest Hand*.

The first thing I have to say about this book is just. *Wow*. I don't think I've ever read a book that has taken me on such a roller coaster of emotions so quickly, so smoothly and so seamlessly. One moment, I'm smiling wide, and having a giggle, the next I'm tearing up and struggling to find breath as I sobbed my heart out, trying frantically to read through the tears and find even more in the story.

The second thing I have to say is – Richardson's female characters. They're absolutely spectacular. Sandrine,

Isabella, how I wish you were real so I could befriend you. Never before have I come across such strong characters written in a horror story – let alone written by a male. The last book, and only book I can remember reading with such a beautifully strong female character, was *The Silence of the Lambs* .

Albeit, Richardson is not on the same level as Harris was, but I strongly believe Richardson has set his own level, and it is one that other horror authors should definitely strive for. Other than my splatter punk readings of Richard Laymon, and my long reads of Thomas Harris, there hasn't been a single horror book I have seriously sat down and read thoroughly through for a long, long time.

The gore content in this, is absolutely brilliant. I don't think it's that much, but then again, I am a bit of a gore freak – so trigger / content warning for gore.

[Tacit] looked over to the left arm and was delighted to see that it was missing.

How can you not love Tacit?! This is just a tiny little bit, and you see so much character development from him in just 352 pages, but this little bit right here, is a line I think I will always remember. It was one of the first lines I read when I first picked this up, and still one of the lines I constantly remember whenever I think about this story. Probably not for most people, but this is one of the many little things of this book that make little gore-horror fans like me giggle with glee.

I'm not usually a fan of stories that have numerous plot lines going on at once, but Richardson has four or five going at the same time, but spreads them all out so well, and links them all also, that this wasn't a problem for me at all. If I didn't understand something in a chapter from, say, the British Front, I knew one of Tacit's chapters, and the main plot line, would bring it all together and explain it later on; I didn't have to sit and ponder, I just knew (after a few goes of this happening), that things would be thoroughly explained and would join in the story as a whole.

I remember when I read *The Hunted*, even the first time when I didn't really enjoy it, I wanted to know more about Tacit, our lead character. That's something I loved about *The Darkest Hand* even right at the start. Despite not really liking the free eBook to get people to read the series, I still wanted to know more about Tacit, and delve more into his past. I found him the most interesting thing within the story, and that, Richardson definitely delivered.

We have short chapters, detailing Tacit's past as the story goes on. Something is explained in the past, and then a short few chapters later, we see how this impacts him within the modern day story. It's an interesting way of story telling, some might even call it foreshadowing, but it is well written, and it's a wonderful technique. I'm hoping that Richardson has the same sort of set up for *The Fallen* , but also, on the other hand, I'm eager to see if he can set up a whole new style of writing for the second book of the series. I cannot wait to delve into *The Fallen*.

The ending to *The Damned* was just absolutely spectacular. This ended absolutely perfectly, and I don't think anything else could have compared. I've been left speechless, and just stared at the wall looking extremely confused to the point my Mom was worried and had to shake me.

Just within a few months, Tacit, Sandrine, Henry, Isabella and many other characters from this book have become a part of my life. I have cried with and over them, cried for joy and sadness. I have smiled along with them, I have found my heart breaking with Sandrine, and with Henry. I have felt the anger, the happiness, the confusion, of all the characters we are introduced to and I have only *one* complaint.

Why – oh why – are these characters not real life people, in this day and age?! I'll even take the demons, the werewolves, the witches, just give me the characters! I love them all so much. It's been such a long time since a book has touch me so deeply, the last one being so being *My Side Of The Story* , way back in 2012-2013. It's been a wonder reading this, to remember how it feels to have a book touch you so deeply, and when it finishes, to feel like you've lost a part of yourself, like you've lost your friends, the people you care so deeply for, and everything that matters. It's been a long, long time since I read a book like this.

So, Richardson, Tarn, thank you so much for offering me a free copy of this book. I am honestly honoured to read such beautiful and stunning writing, and I am more than honoured that you sent me it yourself. This is a book series that will definitely be sitting on my book shelf for a long time, and I will definitely be reading this book, and this series, for a long long time to come. I'm at least looking at keeping it in my reading schedule once a year, probably around October time. I'm so honoured to have met your characters, and to have gone on their journey with them, and I cannot wait to sit and read *The Fallen*, and then *The Risen* .

Already, I'm begging, don't let this series end at *The Risen*! I don't know what happens, but a series or just a single book from your female characters points of views would be absolutely wonderful – I would personally love to know more about Sandrine and Isabella, and definitely see things from their own points of view.

This is a wonderful series, I've only just finished the first book, but I'm already dreading saying goodbye to this one.

I recommend this book to everyone who reads this review, I have nothing but utter praise for it. It's exactly my type of book, and *we need more books like this one*. Richardson, you may have saved the horror genre with a unique piece of work that was well needed. Kudos, congratulations, and I hope to see many, many more books from you, my good Sir.

Alexandra Barnett says

This was an ARC given in return for an honest review

“Henry, listen to me! You are not safe here. Why do you think there were no Germans here when you arrived?...They were forced to retreat. There are many unspeakable things which appear here in the night.”

When I read about this I knew I had to have it and I was so glad that I could have this in advance. Let me just say it is worth the wait! It is everything I love: historical backdrop with supernatural ties, the struggle of good against evil and a little bit of conspiracy!

It is such a shame that, in my opinion, it is rarely done so well. In the back of my mind when I was reading *The Damned* I was thinking about *The Bloody Red Baron* (Kim Newman) and *The Last Werewolf* (Glen Duncan) and considering if Tarn Richardson's attempt was on par.

I will try to do this with as little spoilers as possible! Amidst the beginnings of WWI the cold, tortured soul that is Poldek Tacit is given an assignment – to find out exactly who – or what - brutally murdered a Father in Arras. He is an Inquisitor, seeking out and destroying supernatural beings and heathens alike that threaten the superiority of the Catholic Church. Alongside this he faces a further challenge in the form of the beautiful and pure Sister Isabella. It seems there are those within the Holy See that seek his failure.

Elsewhere, Lieutenant Henry Frost, a noble British soldier, strives to understand what is behind the warnings of both terrified German soldiers, and those given by the seductive and mysterious Frenchwoman, Sandrine Prideux. There is something else, far worse than the threat of the German foe, that is more dangerous, more

bloodthirsty, more vengeful than anything that could be imagined. Something that will change the course of the world if given the chance.

Right! It was a little 'slow' to begin, or am I just really eager? I am not usually a fan of books that jump back and forth in time, perhaps because I am a little lazy sometimes to keep up! Recently I've accepted it happens and doesn't necessarily detract from the story. In this case it worked more naturally the more I read though I just wanted to get through it because I wanted to know what was coming next! It all linked well and was still good to get an insight into Tacit's background, from a rather traumatic event of his childhood, his relationship with Father Adansoni, who sees Poldek as a son, and some experiences leading up to his current assignment.

The book itself is well written, perhaps two stories in one from the different viewpoints – which I enjoyed! It all came together seamlessly. Furthermore, the characters are well-rounded, and interesting. I especially feel the most for Tactic, a man with some serious demons who seems to be seeking peace for himself more than anything else. The ending, happy in some ways, left me wanting more.

I would recommend *The Damned* to those who enjoy horror and the supernatural amidst the historical setting, and even those who don't! It is a credit to the genre. I really enjoyed this début novel and I'm glad I didn't have to wait until May (haha! Sorry folks!). It is well worth the wait however I am dying to read the next in the series! I want to know what happens next!

Dom says

To clarify, this book is an uncorrected proof copy so I will forgive any errors that were contained within.

From the outset, I found the book to be beautifully written. The author has a fantastic turn of phrase and the book is littered with interesting and fresh metaphors. There are two main storylines running through the book, alternating back and forth between the two. One set in France during WW1 and the other detailing pivotal moments in Tacit's past. I must admit that I found the flashbacks a little predictable. I guessed that portion out well before it resolved itself. The main storyline I found to be exciting and interesting, but again I found myself guessing as to the ending. As before, I was little disappointed to find that I had been correct in my musings.

Despite predicting the endings of both timelines, I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I look forward to the next installment and I wish Tarn Richardson every success.

Daniela says

I enjoyed this book from start to finish. great storytelling, suspense and very well written. Thank you to Goodreads for sending it to me.

Seregil of Rhiminee says

Originally published at Risingshadow.

Tarn Richardson's *The Damned* was a pleasant surprise for me, because it's an impressive and well-researched historical horror-fantasy novel. It's a carefully and engagingly written account of terrifying happenings in Europe during the First World War. It depicts a powerful vision of a slightly alternative early twentieth century and entertains its readers with an immersive story that brings freshness and additional terror to WWI stories. Although it has many well-known horror elements, it feels original and is refreshingly different.

I'm pleased to say that *The Damned* immediately pulled me into its dark world when I began to read it. I found myself thoroughly captivated by the story and enjoyed the author's fluent writing style. I was honestly amazed at how good the story was and how much effort the author had put into it, because it turned out to be more complex than I expected it to be. I consider this novel to be a rare treasure that should be read by everyone who loves well-written speculative fiction, because this kind of entertaining and fresh novels are difficult to find.

The Damned combines horror, fantasy, thriller, mystery and religious elements in a powerful way. Because these elements interlink and intertwine throughout the story, it's possible to say that this novel is in equal parts a war story, a supernatural thriller, a mystery story and a historical horror story. It has an epic feel to it, because it has a complex story with a pleasing amount of subplots.

Here's a bit of information about the story:

- The narrative alternates between the late 19th and early 20th century. The events take place in different parts of Europe.
- In Poland in 1889, Father Adansoni is interested in a young boy called Poldek Tacit, whose parents have been brutally murdered. He thinks that the boy may have been saved by some divine power. He takes the boy to the Vatican City and notices that he is strong and learns things quickly...
- On the frontline in Arras in 1914, Lieutenant Henry Frost is fighting against the Germans and faces the horrors of the war. When a German attack begins and suddenly stops, he notices that the Germans are being attacked. When he goes to investigate the trenches he sees a gruesome sight of massacre that is far more terrifying than anything he has ever witnessed before, but doesn't see any bodies. A beautiful woman, Sandrine Prideux, tells him that something terrible and uncontrollable lurks beneath the killing fields...
- On a late night in October in Arras, a young priest, Father Andreas, is extinguishing candles at the end of the evening mass. Suddenly, he hears sounds of movement in the silent Cathedral and is attacked by a beast. Poldek Tacit is sent to investigate the murder. He is simultaneously being assessed by the church...

This is the beginning of a well-crafted story that has a strong main plot and interesting subplots. I find it amazing that the author has succeeded in adding several subplots to his story while maintaining a clear focus on the main events. The story flows effortlessly from start to finish and the subplots add depth and complexity to it.

As readers are introduced to all of the characters, the story gradually blossoms into full bloom and gains more momentum as it draws close to its stunning and climactic ending. Although the story is fast-paced and may seem straight-forward to several readers, it has many shades of grey, because everything is not black and white. This novel has plenty of subtext and subtle complexity that is revealed to careful readers.

The characterisation is excellent and the cast of characters is satisfyingly large and versatile. Each of the major characters is brought to life in a vivid way, because they have their own characteristics and traits that

define them as individuals. They're well-rounded and three-dimensional characters with lives and feelings of their own. Besides concentrating on writing about the main characters, the author makes sure that the minor characters are also interesting.

What makes the characterisation especially effective is that the author introduces his characters well and lets his readers get to know them properly. He pays quite a lot of attention to character interaction and dynamics between the various characters. It's enjoyable to read about what happens between the characters and how they feel about each other, because they have conflicting emotions and feelings about certain things.

Here's a bit of information about some of the characters:

- Poldek Tacit is a memorable and well-created character, because he is not perfect, but conflicted and flawed. He is determined and has a religious conviction, but he drinks a lot and is prone to violence. Although he has been through a lot, has used violence and has seen many things, there's still a spark of humanity in him. Despite his flaws, he is one of the Vatican's best Inquisitors.

- Henry Frost is a young British lieutenant who faces wartime horrors and atrocities on the battlefields of France. He falls in love with a woman called Sandrine.

- Henry's commanding officer, Major Pewter, is a self-centered officer with attitude problems - he can be a full-blooded bastard because of how he acts and what he says to people.

- Sister Isabella is a woman who has been tasked with assessing Tacit's faith. She tries to tolerate Tacit and his behaviour as well as she can, because she thinks that he is intolerable and doesn't follow rules.

- Sandrine Prideux is a beautiful woman who enjoys life in every possible way. She is anything but conventional. She has many secrets that she keeps well hidden.

In my opinion, *The Damned* is one of the few new novels which evoke a distinct sense of time and place, because Tarn Richardson's attention to details is exquisite. The many details enhance the captivating atmosphere and make the story compelling. The author has clearly researched many things to make them seem as realistic as possible.

The author's descriptions of Arras, Famboux and the Vatican City are interesting and vibrant. It was fascinating to read about these places, because they feel realistic and the author writes about them in a lush way. Because the author writes about the Vatican City, it's possible that many readers may feel compelled to compare certain things to how Dan Brown writes about them, but I see no point in doing so, for Tarn Richardson is much better and more skillful a writer than Dan Brown.

I normally tend to avoid reading speculative fiction novels, which feature church issues, religious turmoil and religious conviction, because many authors approach these elements from a wrong direction and often end up preaching about things. Fortunately, this novel is an exception and stands out among other novels of its kind, because religious elements are handled perfectly due to the author's impeccable sense of style. The author's way of handling religious elements can be compared to Teresa Frohock's way of writing about them in her *Miserere: An Autumn Tale*, because there are a few similarities.

The Catholic Church has an important role in this novel. The author shows how the Catholic Church operates, controls people and tries to keep an eye on things, because they monitor various things and have agents everywhere. It was interesting to read about how far its leading figures were willing to go to achieve their goals and how they guarded their secrets.

The battle scenes and the scenes taking place among the officers and soldiers feel authentic. The atmosphere

and overall ambience in these scenes is spot on. The author seems to have a good perception of reality and doesn't shy away from harsh realism that is needed in battle scenes. Action and life in the trenches is presented to readers without glorification.

The hellish and nightmarish scenes containing blood, gore, body parts and slaughter will please readers who enjoy reading about explicit scenes. In my opinion, this novel has a satisfying and stylish amount of gore that has been coupled with Gothic grandness. The author has created a perfect balance between action and horror elements and moves the story swiftly forward.

I found the author's approach to werewolves and werewolf mythology fresh and intriguing. I'm not going to reveal what happens in the story, but the origin of the werewolves is fascinating, because the Catholic Church and the werewolves have a connection that is an important part of the storyline. What I like most about the werewolves in the novel is that the author writes about certain things from their point of view. This is something that is not often seen in horror novels.

I admire the author's way of keeping up tension and creating an atmosphere that exudes fear of the unknown and fear towards the wolves. By not revealing everything at once and delivering hints about what kind of a threat the werewolves pose to people and what their plans are, he keeps the story exciting.

Tacit's training to become an Inquisitor is one of the highlights of this novel. I found these chapters intriguing, because they reveal how Tacit was trained and what becomes of him. There's plenty of raw and unyielding fury and power in these scenes that is far too seldom found on the pages of horror novels.

A major part of the excellence of this novel can be contributed to the author's descriptive and evocative writing style. The author's prose is wonderfully engaging. When you begin to read the story, you'll immediately notice how the author's love for storytelling shines through the text (it's evident that he loves to tell stories and hasn't settled for mediocrity when he has created the story). It's great that the author manages to evoke feelings and emotions in the reader with his text, because it truly makes a difference in this kind of fiction.

There's something in this novel that reminds me a bit of Mark A. Latham's Apollonian Casefiles novels, Dennis Danvers' Wilderness and Stephanie Burgis' historical fantasy novels, because the author has a similar kind of approach to dark elements. This novel also has a few elements that are slightly reminiscent of certain elements in the British horror film Deathwatch, and it has a few tiny and ruthless elements that bring to mind Neil Marshall's Dog Soldiers.

I look forward to reading the next novel in The Darkest Hand trilogy, The Fallen, because this novel gave me a thirst for more. I feel compelled to find out what happens next, because the extract of The Fallen at the end of this novel is fascinating and gives a hint of more greatness to come.

Tarn Richardson's The Damned is one of the finest and most compelling horror-fantasy novels I've ever had the pleasure of reading, because it's a fresh and exciting glimpse into wartime horrors, secrets of the Catholic Church and life during the First World War. I was deeply impressed by it, because it has depth and the characterisation feels perfect. I highly recommend it to fans of the horror genre and also to those who enjoy reading dark fiction that has style and substance. Please, make sure that you'll read this amazing novel, because it's excellent and doesn't disappoint horror readers.

Highly recommended!

Albert says

The Damned by Tarn Richardson is a moody, atmospheric horror novel that starts off very strong and for me, simply falls flat. The premise is one I have read in several different variations but still its been done and by others, far better.

It is the early 1900s and war is breaking out. It will be the first world war that pits nations against nations. In the French city of Arras, a priest is horribly killed. Torn to threads. The Church sends one of its most seasoned Inquisitors to investigate. Poldek Tacit, his mandate, to protect the Church and battle its enemies by whatever means are necessary. But Tacit has seen evil in his lifetime. Found by the Church as a child, clutching the raped and murdered corpse of his own mother. Her killers, dead around her, only the child Tacit left alive. Trained in the art of the Inquisitor, Tacit learns to visit onto those who would do evil the same brutality they would visit on the innocent. But as experience and time has taught Tacit, there are no innocents.

As Tacit arrives in Arras, British and German forces confront one another across a field of trenches. As the night falls and the full moon rises, the British can hear the screaming and fighting across the field in the German trenches. Even more, they can hear the howls in the night. As they go forward to investigate, they find the German trenches littered with corpses. Torn and shredded. Only a few survive and those few only say, "Wolf."

A beautiful and local woman named Sandrine, warns the British soldier Henry Frost that they must leave the area and take shelter indoors during the night. That there is something more terrible than the advancing German army.

Tacit begins to realize that the evil in Arras is more than the work of men. He knows the creature that lives in the tunnels, faced with his own demons and his wavering trust in the Church, Tacit must find the creature and solve the murders of the Priest. But he finds that the Church itself stands in the way of him doing his duty. Their spies watch him and question his methods and there are those whose own duplicity may be at the heart of the murder.

Then there is another murder and worse, another moon on the horizon.

The Damned started off with a bang and then as the story unfolded slowed down to a monotone pace of storytelling. The Werewolves here are actually cursed members of the early Catholic Church who were converted into the creatures as punishment for their lack of faith. Now, realizing that they may have done wrong, the Church wants these creatures killed so that no one will know of what they have done. That is central to this story, the political wranglings of the Church and the brutal methods behind them. I have to wonder if Richardson had simply stuck to the premise of a horror story and not tried to develop the backstory of the immorality of the Church, if the novel would have been better? I believe it certainly would have been faster paced and that at the core of my review is the issue.

The pace. It starts off strong and then slows down and then slows down and somewhere in the middle of this tale you realize that this book is not really telling its own story, but it is setting up the foundation of the next book. That is one of the reasons it fails for me.

The Werewolves also fall flat. A litter of scared and bitter people who hide in the tunnels and feed off of the scraps their keeper brings them. Only when the moon rises and they go out do they become the true creatures they are. But when that happens, the reader hears of it from a distance and it is not first hand narration.

The rest of the characters, minus Tacit, are for the most part secondary. Bit players that have been plugged

into the story but have very little true bearing. They are cookie cutter and dull. Tacit himself basically needs to get laid. Morose and brooding. That act, after a time, well it gets pretty boring.

As I mentioned, I have read this premise before. The Last Werewolf, The Wolf's Hour and though it does not do with Werewolves, The Keep.

This is the first book in series and I may pick up the next book if only to see if it gets better. But not is there is something else to read.

Postconsumer Bookclub says

I suppose I should start the review of The Damned with a mention of it's prequel The Hunted. I read this back in February and my review can be found here. The prequel managed to do some very good things in a short story, but mainly it introduced Poldek Tacit in all his rock hard glory. If I had one resounding wish when I started to read The Damned, it was that Tacit would be a strong and viable character. I was not disappointed. Poldek is most definitely built on extremes, but although violence and alcoholism are the two that dominate; a strong religious conviction, love and tenderness also filter in competently throughout the book. This leaves Tacit as quite a well rounded character (considering the genre we are dealing with!) I wouldn't go as far as to say well adjusted, but where would the fun be in that? Tacit, although the main character throughout the book, is not the only strong personality. There is quite a wide range of characters in the book and this variety successfully provides a required undertone of realism to the otherwise extreme events of the horror/Gothic/war/religious turmoil/death and love story lines! (I've probably still missed a few there?)

The catholic church features heavily throughout the book. It is nigh on impossible to write any book with the catholic church in it these days without there being shadows of Dan Brown lingering around. It's also hard to write a fast paced story set partly in the Vatican without getting a little closer. Parts of the story did remind me of Brown a bit, especially the occasional mention of a servant called Silas! The catholic storyline was however a strong part of the book, being the basis of the creation of werewolf and in being one of the few links between the wolf and war arcs.

The Damned is a horror romp made to be extreme, it is completely it's own story and Poldek Tacit fits this world perfectly. The idiosyncrasies of the style suit the character and therefore the book well. I would be lying if I said that The Damned is not first and foremost a horror story about werewolves and the catholic church. There are numerous scenes that are nothing but well realised, full tilt gore. However, if I concluded my description there I would also be doing the book a great dis-service. Tarn originally wrote a much straighter World War One novel. You can see the detail of the locations and scenes bleed through (for once in the figurative sense and not the claret!) In fact, all of the story arcs come together well and the balance of the whole story grew on me the more I progressed through the book, continuing after I had finished as I thought about it. There is a lot of story packed into the book. The pace is tuned well, but I know I missed some subtleties of the setting and the war as I raced past. I did notice some distinct war details that I did not know about e.g. marching band at the front of the German line. In a trench based scene the description of a sound I didn't expect added depth.

I found it interesting to see the backdrop of World War One used because there is a wonderful synergy between the two story arcs of War and Wolves. In one there is a question about good and evil; which is which in a world where the Catholic Church has gone to such great lengths to eradicate heresy and the werewolves who are a product of that work. In the other arc evil rises in the world; man against man in what we all now was the largest, darkest war in the history of the planet. Good and evil, men in trenches acting on

orders, a very real history with a parallel story superimposed over it. These two stories wind into each other almost just by proximity; a few key characters link the two theatres of carnage and that is all. Now, I was going to say that didn't identify with the WW1 story line as much as the others. I have never been overly interested in war, just one of those things I suppose. That said, I just did quite a good job of describing the emotion of the situation above! Go figure?

The various threads of the story are laid out in just over 100 chapters and this gives the book a very particular, frenetic quality. I have read other books that are laid out in a similar way, but I did find the story line in *The Damned* whipped about quite a bit at the start. Ultimately I got used to it, and the device worked to greater and greater effect as the various story lines came together. This knitting together of the book really did work well as I progressed through it.

I noted down quite early on that Tarn had managed to create some insightful and strong descriptions. I love this type of writing; where a scene, a concept or an emotion is evoked. The relevance of the rest of the book can drop away from these passages, they define good writing whether in fiction, non-fiction, horror, fantasy or the newspaper. A writer's task is to evoke reactions; to paint the story in all its sensory glory. Tarn manages this on numerous occasions. Unfortunately balanced against this quality, there were a few typos dotted throughout the book. They did detract slightly, but not enough to make me give them more than a passing mention.

In conclusion, it is pretty obvious that I really liked *The Damned*. The whole thing built towards a well integrated conclusion. I lament not being able to follow the characters further down their various paths, but hey, that's what books 2 and 3 are all about :)

Lee says

I received this book as an uncorrected proof copy as part of a goodreads giveaway.

To start I really liked this book. It's set in WW1 and has two basic storylines. First what's happening in the present and second flashback moments of one of the main characters life. I found it detailed but fast moving and the story kept you gripped to what was happening. I was surprised by a few things in the book but I really enjoyed the whole story. I heard there maybe a next book, I hope so!

The Grim Reader says

With Halloween edging ever closer, I figured it high time I read something appropriate for this special time of year. Tarn Richardson's *Darkest Hand* trilogy gets off to a fantastic start with this, the opening novel, *The Damned*. It is a novel bursting with memorable scenes, realistic dialogue, great characters and bloody lycanthropic action! I really enjoyed reading this first installment.

When starting a new novel a strong beginning is essential. The reader needs to be dragged in, given glimpses of the journey ahead. Richardson delivers in spades. I was hooked right from the first chapter. The opening chapters see the horror of the Great war brought to life in an exciting beginning that features scenes of absolute horror. And, from then on in the pacing is very good, barely letting up. There are two timelines running through the story and though I am not usually a huge fan of this style, here I was invested equally in the fates of both. I loved the intrigue surrounding the Vatican and the Big Brother stylings of the Catholic Church. The wolf attacks are brutal, as brutal as you will read anywhere else. I'm talking spilled organs,

heads removed, limbs torn off...it's great stuff!

At the centre of *The Damned* stands Poldek Tacit. Tacit is an inquisitor, a Catholic 007, a fixer if you like. Here is a man with a short fuse, an abrupt chap with a difficult personality. He likes a drink, and often lets his fists do the talking. This isn't to say that Tacit is simply a Jack Reacher clone. On the contrary, Richardson has created a well-developed, intriguing character that opens himself up as the story progresses. Yes, he can be a little difficult to like early on in the book, but your patience will be rewarded. As his friendships develop so to do further layers of his personality. I certainly believe that a novel of this length needs and deserves a strong lead, and in *Poldek Tacit*, you certainly get that, however, the Inquisitor isn't the only character that deserves mention. Sister Isabella, Tacit's assessor and reluctant partner and Major Henry Frost also shine and are given their time to blossom in a novel that doesn't treat them as secondary characters.

If you enjoy dark novels with strong characterisation and thrilling plots then *The Damned* is perfect reading for this time of year, in fact, it is perfect reading for any time of the year. The book comes across as very well researched and there is such great depth to the story. Richardson's writing is strong, descriptive, but never overly so and I'm looking forward to more from Poldek Tacit in the next two books in the series.

5/5 full moons from the Grim Reader.

James Howard says

Having been enticed by the dark and intriguing synopsis, I was fortunate to have obtained my advance and uncorrected proof copy of the book by virtue of a GoodReads giveaway.

The book begins depicting a scene of World War One, and then beautifully transcends that time with years prior to develop intricately planned, delivered, and engaging stories culminating to one. Genres are intertwined, tangled together seamlessly where fantasy (an area that I've never been partial to) is presented with entire and frighteningly plausibility, where historical war is depicted and portrayed as if personal experience, all the while maintaining the pace and enticement of a modern thriller.

The book itself is beautifully written, short sharp chapters each leading you immediately to the next, leaving you grateful for the next episode of either of the key story lines through the book.

A flawed and tortured protagonist, Poldek Tacit, is on as much of an internal journey as that of the storyline in which he delves. Another central story offers the perspective of an English Lieutenant as he navigates his way through a torrid world whilst trying to maintain a rare decency in such circumstances.

However all of the characters are incredibly well rounded, maintaining characteristics within their framework yet allowing for significant arcs that are driven by the events they experience. Sympathy and despair is afforded in varying measures to all the characters to which you are introduced. Unspeakable acts of cruelty become understandable, almost irrationally irreproachable. You could feasibly make an argument for every action, every plan, and every strategy – perhaps with the exception of one particularly distasteful sergeant.

I haven't read many, if any books of this type, so if I had to identify a likeness I would cite a Frederick Forsyth novel tinged with elements of Stephen King and any good modern thriller writer.

Incessantly thought provoking, from the perspective of both the angles presented within the story, but also when the inevitable supposition for what the remaining books in the series may entail.

I'm delighted that my first Giveaway win has introduced me to a series, perhaps even a whole genre that would previously have escaped my attention. A fantastic read, one of the most satisfying I've read in some time. Tarn Richardson has a complex and meticulous imagination and I thoroughly look forward to seeing where it next takes me.

Michael Bunn says

I was lucky enough to win an early proof of this book in a Good Books giveaway and I am so glad I did. For those who have to wait until May till you can read it, I feel for you! It truly is an extraordinary book, as strangely uplifting as it is devastating.

Whilst predominately set at the very start of World War One, the back story weaves between the thirty years (or so) before the outbreak of war and the life of the central character, the troubled Inquisitor Poldek Tacit. One of the beautiful things about the book (and there are many) is the way in which it continually keeps you on your toes as to thinking you understand how this damaged individual became as unhinged as he is, the revelations as tangible as they are shocking for the reader.

Some of the phrases and the use of words are just wonderful, the passages about the war and conditions within the trenches as good as any I have read in all forms of literature.

Whilst it does have 'werewolves' in it (and I'm not spoiling the story by saying that - as there's one on the front!), this shouldn't put off the lycanthropic-wary. They are handled brilliantly, a foil to the soldiers toiling in the trenches. The author has done his research well into werewolf folklore and this really comes alive in the pages. You finish the book utterly believing in their existence and how they came into being!

So, is it a horror book? Is it a thriller? Is it historical fiction? Is it a love story? I think it is in fact all these things. It's certainly the best book I've read in a long while. Tarn Richardson has managed to meld these genres into something which is deeply affecting and which deserves a place on any discerning book lover's bookshelf.

Just got to wait a year for the sequel now, so it's not all good news!
