



Death Ground

Ed Gorman

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Bounty hunter Leo Guild is on the trail of a wily mountain man wanted for a deadly bank robbery, but he's not entirely convinced his quarry is the true guilty party.

Death Ground Details

Date : Published March 12th 2013 by AmazonEncore (first published 1988)

ISBN :

Author : Ed Gorman

Format : Kindle Edition 172 pages

Genre : Westerns, Novels



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From Reader Review Death Ground for online ebook

Eric_W says

So I was poking around and reading some reviews when Ed Gorman's name popped up. He was getting uniformly good reviews of both his westerns and mysteries, so I downloaded a couple to my Kindle.

I read a lot of westerns decades ago, going through a phase. Max Brand, Louis' L'Amour, others whose names I can't remember; they all defined the genre. The story lines were basically the same, the scenery similar, and the good guys (oh they might have some minor flaw to provide a semblance of introspection) always shoot straighter and faster. Gorman breaks out of this mold.

Leo Guild is trying to make a living as a bounty hunter. He's just turned 54, the prostitute he's hired as a birthday gift to himself doesn't want to do it, and the guy he's subcontracted to do some bodyguard work, so he could take the day off, has just been killed. He is haunted by his accidental killing of a young girl.

Father Healey is not a priest. An ex-conman wanted by authorities in Chicago for murder, he wormed his way into the good graces of Kriker's "settlement," a collection of sod houses that has grown over the years into a small community of outcasts. Gradually he has come to be accepted by them as a priest as he acts the part.

Kriker is an old mountain man, amoral, but haunted by a young girl, the only survivor of one of his raids on a wagon train where he and his men had killed everyone except this little girl, including her parents. She has been mute ever since. Now she is dying of cholera, and Kriker is desperately trying to save her life using the traditional methods of "granny" an old indian woman. He won't permit any doctors as one failed to save his wife and child. But feeding the hearts of rattlesnake and little birds in boiled milk isn't helping either.

Two deputies, Thomas and James Bruckner, are conspiring to retrieve money Kriker had stolen from a bank. Guild realizes the two were the killers of the two bodyguards whom he feels responsible for. James is defined by his scarred face, badly burned as a child from when his brother, Thomas, poured kerosene all over him and then tossed in a lit match. James has since followed his brother around, constantly cowed in his presence, and Thomas is just plain evil.

The descriptions of Guild and James trekking through a blizzard to get the money in order to ransom Kriker's girl is so realistically portrayed I wished I had read it in July under a baking sun. There are some marvelous evocative descriptions.

I saw glimmers of the hope coupled with despair present in Cages, one of Gorman's truly depressing novellas. This is really a very good book that transcends the shallow boundaries of the genre.

Randy says

Always reliable author. Guild in this one is hired as a bodyguard for another bounty hunter. While off duty, his client and the young man filling in are killed by a mountain man named Kriker. At least that's the official verdict.

Looking into it for the mother of the young man he'd hired to help, he finds there much more going on than the "official" verdict.

Steve says

another Gorman western. this one i keep taking to the beach, twice after having read it. not my favorite gorman.

Jeff Dickison says

A good western with most of the characters having no redeeming qualities, or at least, only a few. No major heroics here although Leo Guild does get the job done. Recommended to lovers of realistic, gritty westerns.

Edwin says

I like this second book in the Guild series as much as the first. Gorman doesn't fool around with his prose or plots, no wasted words or subplots, just a propulsive and well told story that kept me enthralled from beginning to end. I'm looking forward to reading the third book in the series Blood Game.

Still says

Started this outstanding 2nd entry in the "Guild" series on May 12 & finished it on the 13th.
I can't recommend this one highly enough.
Dark and noirish with plenty of action and violence.
Gorman is a brilliant poet of the Noir Western genre.

Charles says

The second in the Leo Guild series.

Tim says

DEATH GROUND is the second book in the Leo Guild series by the late Ed Gorman, and follows Guild's continued efforts to find peace of mind and redemption for his role in the accidental death of a young girl described in the first novel. Guild is still a bounty hunter, and finds himself committed to saving a young girl dying from cholera in a kidnap-for-ransom at the hands of a criminal duo that are brothers. Racing against time and weather, Guild is relentless in his pursuit with hopes of restoring stability in the community affected by sickness that she's been taken from.

I'd have no problem recommending this book to anyone is a fan of westerns in general, and Ed Gorman in particular. Next up in the series is Blood Game.

Tfitoby says

Let me introduce you to Leo Guild, star of Ed Gorman's "Guild" series. Leo is 54, trying to earn a living as a bounty hunter in a time when the Territories are becoming more civilised, he is haunted by mistakes from his past bringing on an air of dark and brooding melancholy, he is cynical and tough but with a soft spot for the simple beauty in life and humanity. He isn't a black hat, a white hat, a hero, a villain, he's an every man who has been through too much and simply wants to do his job to the best of his ability.

“Then he started digging snow up with both hands, and he covered them good, the two of them, and then he stood up and looked out on the unfurling white land. There was blue sky and a full yellow sun. Warmer now, there was even that kind of sweetness that comes on sunny winter days. It made him think of pretty women on ice skates, their cheeks touched perfect red by the cold, their eyes daring and blue.”

Death Ground is the second Leo Guild book but you do not need to read these in order, there is no real arc or character development from book to book, simply the adventures of Guild, a hardboiled man in the old west. In Death Ground he is hired as a bodyguard for a fellow bounty hunter, on his day off his client is killed and so is his newly hired assistant. Guild doesn't know who killed them but he has a hunch and that's all he needs before heading off in to the wilderness with justice on his mind.

This is not a typical western, it is historical drama with a noir flavour, utilising enough of the traditional genre tropes and wrapping them around a hardboiled attitude. Nothing is truly black & white in Gorman's West, in addition to Guild the novel is populated with interesting characters who break the chains of stereotype and caricature, hookers who more often than not can't bring themselves to have sex, cardsharps who find God, law men with diplomas and law men who bend the law, murderers who are filled with doubt and guilt, mountain men who dream of growing old in fields surrounded by a legion of children and grandchildren and priests who find their faith, it's all here, tightly packed in to a short entertaining read.

I had a good time with this one, brief though it was, as once more Ed Gorman demonstrates his abilities as a fine storyteller and highlights the criminal nature of his lack of recognition, which he surely deserves.

“I'm gonna put that gun as far up his ass as it'll go, then I'm just gonna keep loadin' and reloadin' till my arms get tired.”

This is not a western for those with delicate sensibilities, Gorman doesn't shrink from painting a dark picture, you have been warned.

Heath Lowrance says

Just about the most intense Western I've read in a while, this second book in Gorman's series about bounty hunter Leo Guild is a great example of Western Noir, full of characters neither entirely good or bad, some running from horrible tragedies (like Guild himself), others rushing headlong into new fresh mistakes that there's no coming back from. It's a somber, downbeat novel, the last half of it making me rush through in breathless anxiety about how it was all going to end. Brilliant work from a master of the craft. I'll be seeking out the other Leo Guild books, as well as anything else by Gorman.
