



Hard Luck

M.A. Ray

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Dingus Xavier has the worst luck ever. As if just being named "Dingus" weren't enough, he's the red-headed son of an elven mother and a human father.

He might also be a berserker -- and that's just the stuff he knows about.

After Dingus's personal idol happens along in time to rescue him from an angry mob, Sir Vandis Vail expresses an interest in training him. Being part of the Knights of the Air, as Vandis's Squire, no less, is something he's always dreamed of, but never thought he could have. He thinks his luck might actually be starting to turn around.

He couldn't be more wrong. Nobody bargained on the Glorious Kingdom of Muscoda and its state religion, or on how far they'd be willing to go to suppress the Knights of the Air.

Dingus thought he had it bad before, but his rotten luck is only beginning.

Hard Luck Details

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From Reader Review Hard Luck for online ebook

Shauna Scheets says

In reading this author, I am reminded of some of the early works of Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weis. The fantasy world created by M. A. Ray provides for a very enjoyable read. The beginning can take a little while to get into, but once the story gets going, it takes off.

The characters of Vandis and Dingus are very memorable. I can honestly say that I am eager to see what this author puts out next!

* Content and/or language not suitable for young children. *

* I received a copy of this book from the author in exchange for an honest review. *

M.L. John says

Today's review is of M.A Ray's debut novel, the Saga of Menyoral: Hard Luck. The main character is Dingus, a sixteen-year-old boy with extraordinarily bad luck. Not only was he born a half-breed in a racist backwater, but he has a tendency to lose his temper in a spectacular way. It would be better for Dingus if he could keep his head down-an ability which he quickly proves he does not possess. He only survives a lynching due to the interference of Sir Vandis Vail, a famous knight with orders from a goddess to make poor Dingus his squire.

I enjoyed Hard Luck more than anything I've read in a while. It reads like an extended beginning, which makes sense because it is the first book of what sounds like it will be a pretty long series. Even so, it kept my interest: the characters were as real as people you'd meet on a bus, even the ones that could fly. There was just a hint of the epic battle to come, but there was enough to keep me rooted in place. I read the whole thing in two sittings and wished I had more.

This book was a solid beginning and a riveting review. If you have time for a well-written fantasy epic in your life, Hard Luck is for you. Five stars here.

You can find Hard Luck at Amazon: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00H5IPASW>

K.M. Herkes says

I loved this. No single element in this book is astonishing, but calling that a negative would be like taking a bite of an incredible new cookie and saying, "Meh. It's just another cookie. Flour, sugar, butter and some other things. Same as any other one." Some things are more than the sum of their parts. Some cookies are so good that I keep the whole jar in my lap and refuse to share it with anyone, not even Beloved In-House Reader. This book is that kind of good.

It being a book and not a cookie, belly-selfishness does not apply. I am eager to share. Hard Luck is a big bucket of good old-fashioned fantasy fun, and more than that, it is more than just that. Holy wow, is it more. I love this world and the characters M. A Ray has created for it.

Fantasy stories do not have to be about originality, especially not ones that are coming-of-age stories about unwanted outsiders finding a place to belong and setting out on the path to become a shining star. Especially not fantasy stories about unwanted outsiders who have a hidden heritage/destiny that they will have to take up. There's a reason those tropes are so popular. They touch on emotions and conflicts that speak to almost everyone. They made a great foundation.

The trick is building something interesting on the bedrock foundation--creating a world that is complex enough to feel real and creating a hero who has struggles that make sense. M. A. Ray does that, and then presents the result in prose that is deceptively simple and yet shifts seamlessly with the perspective of the characters. Every detail revealed as the plot develops adds to the reader's understanding that there is much more to every situation than meets the characters' eyes. The world-building is right where it should be: in the background. The past is where it should be: in stories and asides and comments. The action moves along fast enough to hold interest, but with plenty of room for characters to interact and develop.

If you've read any of my other reviews, you know I am not inclined to gush. I am a nitpicker, and a detail-noticing critical reader of the most demanding kind. *Hard Luck* has structural flaws that usually drop me out of a story the way cutting the cords of a parachute sends a skydiver plummeting to the earth. It contains indie-publishing foibles that usually bother me the way the sound of fingernails on a blackboard bothers other people. There are issues, yes, but I would have to give it 6 stars out of 5 if it didn't have those flaws. I liked it that much. Seriously.

Sometimes--rarely, oh, so rarely-- a story comes along that is so much itself, so solidly designed and so beautifully presented that I stop noticing little things like too-exuberant use of adjectives, weird paragraph structure, odd name choices, and grammar hiccups. This is one of those. The first few pages did not spark my interest, because prologue, but then, a few paragraphs into the main story, I stopped reading. I immersed myself in the words and rolled around in them like a cat in catnip. I stopped reading and started living the story along with the characters. That doesn't happen often even with books that are polished to a much higher technical standard. It was an amazing experience, and that's not even the best part.

The best part? There are two more books, and each one gets better. One caveat -- cliffhangers, sort of. This series has them. I hate cliffhangers. And I love these anyway. That's the highest praise I can offer any story.

Zachary says

that was a pretty good book.. However, I don't understand the "bad luck" thing. The way I see it he has pretty awesome luck. His grandfather on his mother's side is a famous Elvin warrior who taught him how to fight, hunt, live in the wild, basically anything remotely necessary to be a knight. He's abnormally fast, smart and strong, His father is also a famous warrior who left him two famous one of a kind ancient dwarven swords. His grandfather on that side of the family is a Duke who is completely willing to name Dingus as his heir even though they have never met. Plus when he is about to be killed his idol and famous Knight just so happens to wonder by and offer to make him his squire and train him (even though he really doesn't need the training). The supposed "bad luck" refers to the fact that he is a half blood living in a hick town and so is bullied and eventually nearly lynched and the fact that his name is Dingus, but are either of those things really luck? or just the bad decisions of his weird overprotective bitchy mother. I wish I had this guy's luck!! Plus I don't understand why he doesn't go by like "Gus" or his middle name and/or last name because he has both but decides to tell everyone he meets immediately that his name is Dingus.

Psyche Ready says

This is a really enjoyable and compelling read. I'm buying an e-reader just so I can read the rest of the books! The main character is an extremely relatable outsider who sees himself (like so many of us do) as a collection of weaknesses, and in this story he has to come to terms with his strengths. While this is the thread of many coming-of-age novels, *Hard Luck* does not over-simplify what maturing feels like: it sucks, and it's scary. The world of Menyoral is fascinating--I can't wait to learn more about it--and complex, and is a realistic world with just enough fantasy thrown in. There is also an interesting reflection on both racism and sexism happening in the novel that is important.

J says

Oxymoronic

A great word to describe this interesting piece of work.

A dark and gritty setting contradicts the character driven narrative which centers around a knight and his squire.

A writing style that flows as smoothly as any young adult literature collides with a flare for profanity and vulgar reality.

A world in which racism seems more focused on persecuting the bridges between races than actually disputing racial differences.

Even the characters are outlined with stark contrasts against their own profiles. A wounded boy abused and scarred is blessed with near prodigious skills and abilities. A besmeared girl with the outward appearance of one beyond her years, yet innocent and naive. An esteemed knight whose prose and posture are covered by a silhouette of brash tendencies for snap decisions and crude outbursts.

Right down to the plot which points to a young protagonist on a journey of growth and development who seems to grow very little, while his teacher the knight careens into a chasm of self-discovery he never expected, the contrasts are manifest throughout.

All this clash and contest of contradictions comes together surprisingly well in a fun, if short, intro to what would presumably become a series.

There are a few moments of pause, loose concepts, and undeveloped thoughts that poke out, but they do little to lessen the experience. Perhaps the greatest of these is the wandering story arc, which never seems to nail itself down into any dedicated point or goal. With more direction and a clear goal or antagonistic force for the characters to work with, this story could and likely will (in the following installments) become a great and memorable set of adventures into an intriguing world.

A good way to spend an hour or two, especially if you are into character fueled stories.

Xao Thao says

I want to make it clear that this isn't a children's book. I made that mistake when I first read the summary because the main character was a teenager. No, *Hard Luck* is definitely a magical tale for adults starting out from the beginning in what seems like the brutal and last day of tall, redheaded Dingus Xavier's life. Automatically, I was drawn to this character and I wondered how he was going to survive. Was he suddenly going to go berserk and scare everyone? Maybe even get payback for all the damage they caused to him? No. He was saved by Sir Vandis who "happened" to come across the horrid event.

But with that said, I believe that *Hard Luck* is also for young adults and people everywhere who find themselves in very much similar circumstances of being bullied and being the outcast. Children are not as sheltered as they used to be and a life like Dingus'--different--is what most kids experience growing up today. I would recommend this book for any teenager or young adult to read because it is a very good story that is very similar to what a lot of young people are facing today from discrimination and bullying. And there should be more people like Sir Vandis who would step in to help someone in need.

I really love the fantasy world that M.A. Ray has built with a man who can fly, a teenager who is a berserker, elves, monks, knights, and magic that still remains in a world where magic once flourished but isn't anymore. The characters are real and sometimes a bit gritty, but there are no sugar coating words or things in this novel. *Hard Luck* is a great novel that I would recommend to everyone who loves fantasy!

S.L. Perrine says

I loved this book so much. I had a glimpse of Dingus in a short story of an anthology. I have to say since then I was begging for more, and now I need more. Good thing I have the rest of the books!

Jennifer Seidler says

This was my first true dive into the world created by M.A. Ray and I didn't want to leave just yet. I've read one of her shorts involving the wonderful knight by the name of Vandis Vail, but in this story I got to not only get to know Vandis better, but I also met Dingus. Yes, Dingus. I love the name, Dingus.

This story starts out with a prologue in the grand way prologues go. Very vivid detail and cinematic prose that brings the image of a ritual gone horribly wrong into the mind's eye. After that, though, we see the impact of that ritual. A magical world stripped of its magic, with only vestiges of it remaining. The story involved a fantasy world but it had a strong base in reality, really. Reality for a made up world is a difficult thing to pull off but there you have it. I adored Dingus. He was a plucky character, very easily likable, honest, yet not without his foibles and things that make you just want to smack yourself in the head and go, "oh, Dingus!"

As for the writing, there were no places where I found myself dragged out of the narrative, but there were some instances where I had to go back and re-read a sentence once or twice to figure out what was being said. There were a few places of telling as opposed to showing, but in a story like this, sometimes that's necessary. Or, a tidbit given by telling was or is going to be something that's important down the road or in the moment. Such as us being told that Vandis had a sweet tooth, but couldn't eat candies like he used to.

Well, that told us that his sharing of a caramel later on was a rather important thing for him to do. The book tackles issues such as racism with aplomb and wonderful contrasting flowing ideas. Kessa's predicament given her tender, tender age broke my heart and Dingus' honor with her made me love him even more.

Plot wise, I'm sure that what happened in this book sets up for much more down the road, but I did find the ending a little abrupt. I wanted more and that's a good thing, especially after the culmination of one subplot involving a young boy and burgeoning magic, and the other with Dingus himself and his own heretofore "hidden" talent. The action scenes at the end were well rendered and painted vivid pictures in my mind. The wander/quest plot did wander a bit, but I understood why and it didn't take away from my enjoyment of the story at all. The plot was dark yet light hearted if that makes any sense. Definitely not for kids, though. I never criticize a book for swearing, ever, but as a review I gotta say it's in there. It's in there but it leant to the truthfulness of the story, the backwater kid and the cranky knight, of course they're going to swear. :) Some hints of sexual situations and violence, but nothing more violent than what's seen in much YA fiction these days anyway.

I think Vandis and Dingus are going to stick with me for a long while. Also, after I finished reading *Hard Luck* I picked up the sequel. As a friend of mine says, she votes with her wallet when it comes to things she reads, and I do as well. My vote's been cast.

Fiona Skye says

M.A. Ray has a winner with this first installment of the *Saga of Menyoral*. The book takes a common fantasy book trope--that of a misfit kid with blood ties to nobility (think Carrot from the *Discworld* books by Sir Terry Pratchett, only Dingus has been raised by elves and not dwarfs)--and breathes new life into it. While slightly anachronistic and definitely not for kids, I still loved this book. It's a quick, fun read with some bright, engaging characters. (Seriously. I have a bit of a crush on Vandis!) The only thing that disappointed me was the ending. It was so abrupt and not satisfying. Luckily, the next book will be out soon!

Sylvia McIvers says

Rothganar, land of magic, unicorns, dragons, and elves. But in the prologue, the priests banish magic. They all die in the backlash, but what wider effects will take place after they destroyed a huge part of their ecosystem? No healers, for one, and drearier lives for all. The first chapter takes place 37 years later, so a generation and a half grew up with no magic.

Kill the magic – and kill the elves. Chapter One opens with a crowd gathering to lynch Dingus the half-elf for beating on the bully who had beaten him dozens of times. The tree they want to rope him up on is a dryad, a friend. She can't save him, , but she can mess up the rope, delay the hanging Dingus – until a Knight of the Air comes to rescue him. Seriously, flying? awesome talent.

Sir Vandis thinks he's going to be a hero to the kid – and he is – but Dingus surprises him by having forestry skills, the ability to make a three course meal by hunting, and a quick brain. Also, surprising, Dingus expects to be hit every time he asks a question, or makes a mistake. Sir Vandis is going to work on that. And then there are some relatives that even Dingus doesn't know about, but he looks just like that guy...

Education and adventure ensue. Watching Dingus grow from a teen who hides from everyone to a hero who rescues people is fun, and watching the person he rescues become an even better fighter than him is more fun.

Then there's the priests – killing off the magic wasn't enough, there's another plan afoot, not resolved in this book but building up to the next book in the Menyroyal Saga.

Bechdel Test – pass

Johnson Test –skin color is never mentioned, hair ranges from red to yellow to black

Jen Ponce says

I agree with the praise of others who have reviewed Hard Luck and since they touched on all the important parts, I'll settle myself in to talk a little bit about what this book could mean to someone who is going through life being bullied.

Dingus is a kid who grew up reviled and degraded because of something he couldn't change about himself--he was born half-elf, half-human in a town that looked down on anyone different than they. Bullying of any kind is awful and Dingus lives the first 16 years of his life in a place where the other folk think it's okay to allow their full blood children crap on another kid's chest because he's different.

The author doesn't give any easy answers, either. Vandis Vail, Knight of the Air, saves Dingus from being hung but he doesn't swoop in and rescue the kid, tucking him away from harm. He teaches him, instead, giving him tools he can use to find his own way. It's never a good idea to rescue someone--you never get that right--and Vandis is smart enough to know that he has to let Dingus find his own way.

I disagree with some reviewers who say this is a book for adults--sure, adults will love it too, but this book is for kids who stick out, who are different, who've heard someone moo when they walk down the hall or have been called names or pushed up against a locker, "Because I don't like your face."

This is a book for the kids who haven't made it into the media for shooting up schools or shopping malls, who are still looking for a reason why they are who they are and the way they are despite the constant abuse from the outside world that doesn't understand them.

I really enjoyed the book and am looking forward to reading the next installment of Dingus' story. Yay!

M.A. Ray says

Seems egotistical to rate this. Awfully proud of it, though. :D

Sarah Ivory says

Every now and then I like to try new authors, and as I do enjoy a good fantasy tale, I decided to give Saga of Menyoral: Hard Luck a try. Well, I'm sure glad I did! Thoroughly enjoyed it from start to finish! A very relaxing, easy read which flowed along nicely. It tells the tale of several key characters, the main being a young man named Dingus, a persecuted half-breed who "lucks" into becoming a Squire of Sir Vandis Vail, a Knight with a hard reputation- and an interesting way of dishing out justice...

If you enjoy a good epic fantasy, then give this one a try. You won't be disappointed.

Mark says

Alright start to this series, I love Berserks since I was a kid and watched Record of Lodoss War, haven't found too many books with berserkers in it, closest I've found were some books with Vikings, Demonsouled by Jonathon Moeller and Legend by David Gemmel.

I liked the story, but not enough action for me...I enjoyed a few of the characters, but once you start to get attached to them the book ends. I got book 2 just to see where Dingus ends up...

One thing I didn't like, was as soon as you are introduced to Keassa - she offers herself to a character in some pretty suggestive ways..then you find out she's twelve! Don't know why the author couldn't age her up a bit...another thing, the party gets attacked by 5 men at one point, you have a Knight who is supposed to be this bad ass, yet he just accepts that they are going to rob him of pretty much everything? And Dingus had been training by this point and has proven that he was also capable swordsman (with either hand!) so why the hell let yourself be robbed? I liked how that ended...but still, Vandis is supposed to be epic, and I've yet to see him do much of anything.

I like the Knights of Air situation and whats going on in the world, and I hope Dingus can man up a bit in the next book. You are no Drizzt Do'Urden, but I'm still waiting to see you dual wield those epic blades you have.
