

Beyond a Darkened Sky

Dana Alexander

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Beyond a Darkened Sky begins its fantasy series in an endearing way, building to a epic showdown between good and evil.

In Dana Alexander's endearing fantasy *Beyond a Darkened Sky*, a woman grows into her powers as she faces an epic battle.

Sara has a troubled past; she was orphaned and mistreated. In her adulthood, she's turned her innate empathy and desire to help others into a storied career as a psychiatrist and philanthropist. That empathy, as it turns out, is a supernatural gift, bestowed upon her because, in her past lives, she was a warrior of great renown, battling the forces of darkness.

One such force is once again amassing, and so Sara is called upon to retrieve three important artifacts to repel it, save the earth, and protect her soul mate. The group that charges her with doing this is the same group that blocks her past memories, though.

With so much in the balance, Sara's consciousness travels to a parallel realm where she trains for the coming fight; in her daily life, she seeks the artifacts in time with her normal tasks. But when Sara endures a horrific accident, the line between dreams and reality is blurred; when she wakes, she finds herself connecting to her doctor, Kevin.

The text trades between Sara's fighting in the fantasy realm and her slow-burning romance with Kevin. It moves with speed. Sara is fascinating: strong, independent, and driven. She eschews social pressures, dedicates time to charities, and amasses an impressive sports car collection, not to mention her warrior past and powers. While she accepts her quest, she keeps up with her other responsibilities, too.

Though the story is anchored to Sara, the larger perspective, including the threat to humanity, is ever present. Shadowy creatures stalk innocents; a succession of hurricanes threatens the East Coast. Reminders that the battle between good and evil is larger than Sara and her romance make the text dynamic.

Slow, steady characterizations help everyone to grow in time with the story. Sara's connection to Kevin eschews tropes; he admires her independence and their bond deepens. Sara's relationships with her adoptive mother and new allies grow and build as she learns about her powers, too.

Characters' thoughts liven up lengthy sections, their clipped structures contrasting with flowing descriptions of the scenery. Scenes are dynamic, paying attention to characters' placements and movements. The book's language shifts to reflect the two realms; the fantasy realm is narrated in a surreal tone, revealing a fantastical version of Earth whose magical elements are subdued. Its ruling ancient council consists of beings without form whose appearances are rare, while Sara and her allies control elements as needed. The novel balances its magic and realism in a grounded way.

Ending with an engaging tease of things to come, *Beyond a Darkened Sky* begins its fantasy series in an endearing

way, building to a epic showdown between good and evil.

JOHN M. MURRAY (October 15, 2019)

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