



Krakencourage

John Graham

KDP

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Krakencourage is a cerebral and visceral science fiction thriller.

John Graham's *Krakencourage* is a complicated science fiction thriller in which all of humanity is at stake.

In a story that is rife with drama, Gabriel Thorn is honest, loyal, and brave almost to the point of madness. He is tasked with uncovering the truth about an alien ship whose entire crew was massacred. He uncovers a cause that, if not surprising, is nevertheless ingenious.

Standing in Gabriel's way is a cabal of high-ranking officials, some of whom belong to the Directorate of Naval Intelligence, the most powerful organization in the entire solar system. In order to bust up the conspiracy, Gabriel, his allies, and his family have to go to war with fellow humans, with all trying to survive on the fringes of far-flung galaxies.

This is an intellectual thriller that strikes a balance between "intellectual" and "thriller." It is complex and demands attention. The sheer amount of worldbuilding involved is staggering, with entire cities and civilizations grafted onto an even larger picture centered around humanity's conquest of the cosmos, an idea that is made plausible and enjoyable.

Still, the worldbuilding details become oppressive. In some passages, the action slows to a crawl as granular details concerning the DNI's apparatus or neocolonial cities of the intergalactic sprawl overwhelm it. In contrast, the book's action scenes are beautiful, well rendered, and exciting.

Gabriel is the book's most interesting character, both an everyman father figure and a larger-than-life hero. When it comes to ethics, this is a black-and-white universe, with Gabriel always wearing a white hat and his enemies rocking black ones. The black-hatted villains are individually indistinct, though as a sinister collective, they are fascinating. In many ways, the conspiracy that felled the alien ship is the most realistic aspect of this novel—even more earthy than tough-talking Gabriel.

As the plot becomes more extraordinary, more fantastical, and less like the contemporary world, conversations turn risible, including between ancillary characters from the "Skull-men" to galactic pioneers, who are either unbelievable ciphers or mute shadows.

In the last third of the book, the story moves towards its conclusion at a furious pace. The final few paragraphs are a near perfect summation of the book's action and its theme of impossibly heroic struggles. Although he does not really need it, Gabriel gets his redemption at the end, but a whole lot of bloodletting and lies have to be digested first.

Krakencourage is a cerebral and visceral science fiction thriller that balances the outrageous with the familiar.

BENJAMIN WELTON (May 1, 2019)

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