

Retrograde: The Darkness

A. O. Godmasch

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Retrograde is a slow-burning science fiction adventure whose heroine is primed to win the age-old battle between good and evil.

A dark mist swirls through the streets, infecting everyone in its path, in A. O. Godmasch's science fiction novel *Retrograde*.

On the planet Damara, Isis is the president's daughter, though she does not take her privilege for granted. Rejecting her mother's expectation that she should be ladylike and stay at home, Isis instead chooses to fight on behalf of the underprivileged and to save as many lives as she can from the fast-approaching copper moons that usher in the dreaded retrograde.

When the retrograde strikes, "the sky turns dark, and daylight never arrives." Taking the form of a thick dark mist, the retrograde infects healthy humans, turning most into zombie-like creatures called changelings. Others spontaneously combust, melt, or disappear altogether. As the citizens of Damara watch televised reports of the retrograde as it annihilates a neighboring planet, they predict that this retrograde will be the worst in history. The wealthy among them install protective measures in their houses and inoculate themselves against the mysterious mist.

Isis's world is built via hints of it, as when, before the retrograde strikes, she peers out of her bedroom window at the purple and orange hues of Ra, Damara's sun, and notes the artificial breeze that blows through the ventilation system. Elsewhere, Damara is referred to as both a planet and a region of Cairo that is neighbored by Illyan, which consists of woodlands. The time period in which the story takes place is unknown, but the presence of communication devices and sophisticated ventilation systems suggests that technology is crucial to human survival.

Supporting characters are introduced in single dimensions: one soldier is a "fair-looking guy with a well-groomed beard and prominent look about himself," while another is "handsome [and] muscle-bound with a squared jaw, brown hair, and gray eyes." Main characters counterbalance these stereotypical constructions: Isis comes of age over the course of the novel and experiences several firsts, including romance; and Khalfani, an army leader, is driven and haunted by flashbacks of his mother's murder.

Some of the story's events arise at odd times, including an impromptu wedding in the midst of the retrograde that requires a pivotal character to leave the safety of their bunker and travel cross country to attend it. But as the story, which is underpinned by themes of good versus evil, progresses, it becomes clear that there is more to the mysterious mist than meets the eye. As the dark mist travels through the woods claiming lives, it develops into a formidable arch nemesis with ties that are closer to Isis than she first realizes; this reveal sets the stage for a longer battle than initially envisaged.

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