



Targon: The 6th Realm

Gregg Bauer

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At first glance, *Targon: The 6th Realm* appears to be your standard science fiction world-is-about-to-end/exodus type of story. It may be that, but it is also much more. The first hint comes on page 134, when we unexpectedly encounter talking ravens. The birds not only speak, but they do it in Latin. Whether this is a bold or silly plot device is a decision readers will have to make on their own.

Hard science enthusiasts who pick up *Targon* for its story line about the race to build and launch a ship to find and colonize a new home for a dying world may groan and stop reading. While that is their privilege, it would also be their loss. Intrepid readers who go on to the second story—especially those open to an ample serving of fantasy and magic with their science fiction—should find it compelling, if not interesting, surprising, and entertaining.

The second plot is part *Indiana Jones* archaeology, part *Dungeons and Dragons* adventure and part Latin language academic exercise. While the first story deals with the challenges of building a giant colony spaceship as the world crumbles, the second is where the real action takes place. Here there are ancient scrolls to be interpreted; monsters, sorcerers, and trolls to encounter; challenges to overcome; and battles to be fought and won.

Lovers and former students of Latin alike (the two are sometimes mutually exclusive) will either smile or roll their eyes as they lap up or struggle with the author's increasing use of Latin (much of it composed of or built around famous quotations). The talking ravens are not alone in quoting Juvenal and Cicero. To say more would give away too much of the plot, and that would be a disservice to author Gregg Bauer and those who press on to cross his literary Rubicon.

Why Bauer opted for Latin is not immediately clear. Perhaps he felt it would more effectively convey his ideas and set the mood than a language of his invention. A critical reader might also quibble over how a world without a Germany or a China has Bavarian twist rolls and Cantonese toast—or for that matter, how it has a Princeton, Victoria, and other earthly names, let alone speakers of Latin. These are small puzzlements, however. While never answered, they only mildly interfere with the pace of a good read.

And *Targon* is a good read. What makes it that way are Cray and Eton, the principal characters in this familiar but not quite contemporary world. Both are likable and believable—no mean feat for an author in this mixed genre. They come across as real people living real lives, even as they advance two complimentary story lines that intersect in a dramatic and exciting finale.

Perhaps the characters in *Targon* sum up the experience of reading this novel most succinctly. One talks of being on “the ride of lifetime.” Another observes, “That was a blast, yeah, a real blast.” Or maybe still another character, referring to the Latin-speaking ravens, puts it best: “I just don't trust the birds.”

MARK G. MCLAUGHLIN (July 14, 2011)

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