



The Dark That Dwells

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Digman and Roddy (Jul 10, 2020)

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The Dark That Dwells is a powerful start to a new space opera series.

In Matt Digman and Ryan Roddy's robust space opera, *The Dark that Dwells*, four strangers face their fears as the return of a dark entity looms.

Human beings have spread across the stars, settling into an uneasy alliance of planets only to begin expanding once more. The discovery of new technology and abandoned alien artifacts fails to overshadow signs of a cold, calculating evil awakening, one with an insatiable hunger.

Four unlikely human heroes find their lives upset in the process: Sidna, a young mage eager for knowledge; Fall, who earns a living as a mercenary and guide in unexplored space; Ban, a haunted marine grappling with mental trauma; and Tieger, who commands a feared starship in his fanatical quest to purge the galaxy of mages. The threat from beyond known space forces the four into an uneasy alliance within a quest that spans planets, time, and dimensions.

Deep world building is teased out between moments of action, and an abundance of details makes otherwise confusing scenes clear. Unusual, crystalline worlds have shifting realities. Populated worlds brim with unusual animals and humans. All are set within a universe that is made to feel old and worn. Decaying ships, abandoned cities that are crumbling to dust, and derelict constructs containing ancient magic factor in, while the godlike beings that came before have intriguing backstories filled with all-too-human tendencies toward revenge and greed.

Tieger, Fall, Sidna, and Ban's viewpoints are moved between: while Fall confronts his dreams, Tieger continues his barbaric torture, though his connection to religion forces him into an unusual position. Each of the four confronts and surpasses their fears, and the book becomes tense in the process. Ban's past trauma lurks beneath the surface; facing what he considers to have been his greatest mistake is a vital plot point, and connected failure would mean being devoured by an emissary of the darkness. Each of the four confronts obstacles, their successes and failures forcing evolution and resulting in a more complicated larger conflict.

Crackling, compelling conversations help move the story forward, and Fall's imp companion's sassy retorts and scathing remarks stand out. Paragraphs are short and sweet, capturing and holding attention well, and chapters are just long enough to be engaging. Many end with tantalizing teasers, while the book itself suggests another volume.

The Dark That Dwells is a powerful start to a new space opera series; it blends science fiction and fantasy well.

JOHN M. MURRAY (March 25, 2020)

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