

The Guardian Corps: Book One-the Argent

Daryl Edwards

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It is impossible to read Daryl Edwards's *The Guardian Corps* without visions of the most recent Star Wars trilogy. His Guardians are a mix of Templar crusaders, Green Beret commandos, and, especially, Jedi knights. While they may not be able to wield the power of "The Force," they possess finely honed physical, mental, and martial skills far beyond those of mere mortals. The Guardians—along with their loyalties to their faith, government, and one another—are put to the test in this exceptionally well-written, often thrilling, and almost always entertaining adventure story.

Set on a planet that appears to be in this solar system, Edwards's world is both foreign and familiar. There is a powerful monolithic theocracy modeled on the Catholic Church and an apparently democratically-elected president and legislature that govern the planet. But there are cracks in this seemingly unified structure: Racial tensions, personal rivalries, corporate greed, repressed ambitions, and conflict over church/state control versus the free will of the people all contribute to the boiling pot upon which the Guardian Corps is struggling to keep a lid.

The story's planet, Kerguelen, is not Earth; Edwards makes that clear when a team of space explorers discovers a probe they believe originated on the third planet from the sun (the "blue and white" one, they note). There may, however, be some connection to Earth, for on Kerguelen the "ancient" and "biblical" tongue is Latin. A genetically-enhanced race of former slaves are denigrated as "Helots" (the name for the slave/serfs of ancient Sparta), and Cupid, Lucifer, Shiloh, sheikh, Bedouin, Papal, Cardinal, and other names, titles, and terms unique to Earth history and mythology are bandied about freely. Hopefully these are hints of what is to be revealed in the next book in the series, as Edwards seems entirely capable of creating his own world, culture, and mythology.

While parts of the book are overly-talky and a winnowing of about one page in ten would improve and pick up the pacing, the novel is otherwise solidly structured. The characters are well designed, and Edwards has breathed life into the collection of churchmen, politicians, soldiers, "star sailors," and others—among them a scaly-skinned, red-eyed denizen—who populate his world.

Despite the author's tendency to burden the plot with too much backstory, there is a good deal of action in the book, from gunfights and duels with demons to pitched battles and one fairly steamy sex scene. There is also a space exploration and starship-in-trouble subplot, and although *The Guardian Corps* is often more religious-themed sword-and-sorcery fantasy than science fiction, there is also enough of the latter to keep fans of that genre turning its pages.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (October 25, 2012)

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