

Voidstalker

John Graham

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Voidstalker is an engaging science-fiction adventure that marks the beginning of a fascinating new series.

John Graham's *Voidstalker* is an explosively fun science-fiction adventure in which a team directed to protect alien technology ends up grappling with an unstoppable force.

On Asgard, a planet within humanity's vast empire, Gabriel Thorn leads a comfortable life. He lives in a thriving metropolis, Asgard City. In order to secure the setting's literal heights—the city is divided between the rich who reside nearly in the clouds and the poor in the Undercity—Gabriel serves as a Voidstalker, an elite lone-wolf agent tasked with deadly missions.

As part of his latest assignment, Gabriel is saddled with a squad and sent to investigate a corporation said to be researching—but suspected of exploiting—alien technology. While Gabriel and his squad delve into the mystery, his wife, engineer Aster Thorn, becomes embroiled in a corporate conspiracy.

Voidstalker takes cues from video games to plot its narrative, especially in Gabriel's sections. Gabriel and his squad arrive at the facility to an immediate attack from unmanned drones. After breaching it, events follow a steady upward trend in action toward more and more significant battles before the book's climactic end. In between each action tick, the narrative shifts back to Asgard City, where Aster battles with authorities and a gangster mother-in-law.

Action sequences, while filled with thrills and gore, fall flat. Gabriel and his team wear nearly invulnerable armored suits; most of the threats they face fail to do significant damage or to derail their forward progress. A lack of character development for the squad further hampers the tension; their individual survival has little impact on the story or Gabriel.

Major characters benefit from stronger character development. Before the events of the book kick off, Gabriel is shown suffering from nightmares that become increasingly relevant. His wife is an active character who plays a significant role within the central corporation and other events in Asgard City. She may start out as a nagging wife, but by the end she is a well-rounded, fleshed-out actor.

Prose is strong, with bare-bones scene setting and character descriptions. It's always clear where the action unfolds and who plays important roles, but the rest is left to the reader to fill in. This sparse style works well and everything flows smoothly. Titles and nomenclature are inconsistently used for various characters, entities, and places.

The events of Gabriel's mission and the climax hint at future books, hopefully ones that expand on this entry's world building and build upon the ramifications of Gabriel's mission and humanity's interaction with aliens.

Voidstalker is an engaging science-fiction adventure filled with blockbuster action sequences; it marks the beginning of a fascinating new series.

JOHN M. MURRAY (February 15, 2018)

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