

Into a Dark Frontier by John Mangan

5 Stars

A non-stop action thriller packed with adventure and danger

In the near future, the continent of Africa has collapsed into chaos, with criminals and rogue security agents ruling over a greatly diminished, poverty- and disease-stricken population. Over in America, ex-Navy SEAL Slade Crawford has been falsely accused of terrorism by the government he spent 20 years serving. Emotionally broken by the death of his son in a terrible accident and the resultant falling apart of his marriage, Slade decides to take up the offer of being professional Security Advisor to a group of fundamentalist Christians called the Judeans, who hope to resettle in the decimated Africa.

Escaping from the country that betrayed him, he arrives in Cape Town and sets out across the wilderness with his newly trained associates. However, they soon discover that the situation is more desperate than they suspected, with evidence of brutal organised attacks being carried out on foreign settlements. As Slade struggles to keep the group alive, he finds himself captured by a US colonel Gary Kraven who agrees to let him go free but blackmails him into investigating a sinister blood cult that seems to be responsible for the attacks. Torn between doing what he must to survive and maintaining his honour, Slade attempts to pursue the cult, but finds himself fighting for his life and the lives of the Judeans and having to ultimately decide where his loyalties truly lie.

This book begins with Slade fleeing the US in a stolen truck, eventually escaping by stealing a plane and flying off over New York Harbour before parachuting down to the boat that will take him to Africa. This adrenaline-thrilled sequence sets the pace for the rest of *Into a Dark Frontier*, which rarely lets up on the level of action from that point on. The gripping writing moves at a lightning-fast pace with constant twists and turns and the reader finds him/herself rapidly turning pages, desperate to find out what will happen next. The momentum slows down a little during the second half, but picks up rapidly towards the end for the thrilling finale, which leaves the story open for a potential sequel – something I would definitely want to get my hands on if it were to be written.

I found the background plot of this story to be highly imaginative and quite unusual. The concept of an entire continent devoid of civilisation is a frightening one, and the way that the author describes how the lawless state of Africa came to be is unsettlingly plausible. With the state of the world as it is at the moment, the thought of some dramatic act of war leading to a drastic re-organisation of the way that civilisations are run is not too inconceivable, and reading fiction about one possible outcome of such an event is both entertaining and chilling.

Slade, whilst initially coming across as a little bit clichéd, is a likeable and understandable hero who I felt empathy for throughout the story. His backstory is suitably tragic and, despite his many obvious flaws, he is evidently a good man who has suffered a lot at the hands of those who he was loyal to. The supporting characters were also interesting and likeable, especially the kind-hearted Judean leader Abe and Elizabeth, the feisty daughter of one of the Judean refugees. My one criticism of the

characterisation was that the villains of the story felt a little two-dimensional and at times it seemed like Slade was almost too skilled and too much of a stereotypical action hero in his encounters with them.

Overall, I enjoyed this book immensely and would definitely be keen to read more by this author, either in the form of a sequel or a new story.

Daenerys

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review