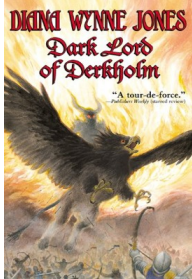




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



Dark Lord of Derkholm
By Diana Wynne Jones
Discussed April 2002

Discussion Summary

Rather than our usual round of questions, this month we provide a summary of our more free-form discussion of *Dark Lord of Derkholm*.

On April 25, 2002 the LSF reading group had its monthly meeting to discuss *The Dark Lord of Derkholm* by Diana Wynne Jones. While most people enjoyed the book, the consensus was that it was not as interesting a read as her previous work - *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*, which forms the backdrop for the events in **Dark Lord**.

The Tough Guide is a humorous parody of a travel guide purporting to prepare readers for commercial tours of a "real" medieval fantasy world. Listing every cliché imaginable, it pokes delicious fun at the conventions we have all come to expect and love/hate in the high fantasy genre. **Dark Lord** is the story of the actual tours. They are seen through the eyes of the poor denizens of the planet that have to endure the carnage caused by these tours year after year. The heroes of the book are the Wizard Derk and his family (made up of humans and magical beasts) who must shoulder this year's burden of playing the part of the tour's Dark Lord. This burden is only accepted because Mr. Chesney, the merciless entrepreneur organizing these tours, has acquired some sort of hold over Derk's world and its inhabitants. Discovering what that hold is and breaking it forms the plot for the story.

Part of the disappointment with **Dark Lord** stems from the fact that while **The Tough Guide** is geared toward the adult reader, **Dark Lord** is geared more toward children or young adults. This is not surprising, since the author, an accomplished writer, has geared most, if not all, of her books toward this age category. As a children's book, it follows the usual conventions - the story concerns the coming to age of, not only Derk and kin, but also of Derk's world as its people assume responsibility for their fate and free themselves from Chesney's deprecations. However, the reading group agreed that while enjoyable, even as a children's book the novel suffers from several weaknesses. First, the characters (with the possible exception of Derk and his son Blade) are not presented with depth or much development. Second, the sense of Evil presented by Mr. Chesney seemed insufficiently threatening compared with the villains of other Children's works (i.e. Voldemort from the Sorcerer's Stone). Finally, several members of the group thought that the use of *Deus ex Machina* in **Dark Lord** was too strong and diluted the theme of people assuming responsibility for their own fates.