



The Dark Hills Divide

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The Dark Hills Divide introduces readers to Alexa Daley, who annually visits the town of Bridewell. Alexa is curious about what lies beyond the massive ramparts that surround the city and the walled roads that link Bridewell to nearby towns; soon after town leader Thomas Warvold passes away, Alexa finds herself outside the walls, acquires a stone with remarkable powers, and discovers that she's meant to stop a potential war from occurring.

[Author notes in a video blog at <http://www.patrickcarman.com/wp-conte...>, about the series reading order that the books in the original trilogy (*The Dark Divide #1*, *Beyond The Valley of Thorns #2* and *The Tenth City #3*) should be read in that order and that *Stargazer #4* read after the original trilogy. Otherwise is up to reader preference. *Into The Mist*, is a chronological prequel to the trilogy, but the story is told by characters on the boat where *The Tenth City* left off; it can be read before or after the original trilogy.]

The Dark Hills Divide Details

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Author : Patrick Carman

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From Reader Review The Dark Hills Divide for online ebook

Kit says

I was hoping that this would be a series I could recommend to voracious middle-grade fantasy readers, but no such luck. There are the seeds of a good story here, with at least one good character and the possibility of a suspenseful plot. As it stands, though, they are overwhelmed by vast info-dump and the feeling that it doesn't *matter* if anything the characters do is something a real, sane person *would* do - if the author needs it to happen, it's going to happen regardless of how many WTFs it induces.

There are bad guys who are inexplicably and suddenly bad for no reason. There's a traitor who seems for all practical purposes to be better off staying on the good side, if only for selfish gain, but who turns traitor anyway. And in one small example of total *huh*, there's a library book about Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, the Spanish explorer, in an otherwise totally fictional world. But (a) the story in the book has nothing to do with the real Cabeza de Vaca, and (b) throughout, the main character calls him "Cabeza," as if that were his first name.

I read it all the way through, mostly to see what on earth *else* could happen. I hope Carman hits his stride in the other books in the series, and his ideas have a better chance to come out in the clear.

Shantelle says

What a delightful and charming tale! I can hardly believe I've been missing out on this splendid, little series all this time!

The Dark Hills Divide by Patrick Carman brings us into the intriguing Land of Elyon, where we meet sweet Alexa Daley, who is quite smart and courageous. She's been trying for quite a while to learn of what lies beyond the walls that at times seem to imprison her. Meanwhile, her father and his fellow advisers and friends try to keep her out of trouble. But upon old Warvold's sudden death, a chance is opened up to Alexa to explore deep mysteries and dark places. What will she discover? Does danger await her?

I think only two of my friends on Goodreads, (that I've noticed), have read this book. They had nothing but good to say about it; and after surveying the intriguing and utterly charming cover, I had to add this book to my to-read list. Just in case. Recently, I scrolled through my TR list, looking for a book to read next ... and decided to try out *The Dark Hills Divide*. Am I ever glad I did! *smiles*

It's a short-ish, small book, perhaps geared toward a bit younger audience than myself, but nevermind!

grins It has the potential to please many. I am thinking of recommending this book to my eleven-year-old brother, and twelve-year-old sister. I think my fourteen-year-old sister would enjoy it as well. And I loved it! I'm so excited to read the next stories in the series! It's just one of those timeless tales that for some reason or another absolutely enralls you. Like *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis. Adventure. Brave children. Mystery. Fun. Sweetness. Magic. It a story that thrills the soul and tells one there's more to life than just purposeless, day-to-day, "going through the motions". There's meaning and lost magic, but you must go on an adventure to find it! **I hate using the word *magic*, because it can mean such a wide variety of things. But in this case, it all felt like Narnia "magic". Not really magic, just a world of things and possibilities you didn't think existed.**

It seems there could be some allegories going on here. Perhaps a Christian-allegory? I'm not sure. But it altogether quite simply a beautiful, though at times harsh, story. The epilogue promised much more to come,

more mystery, and more discovery! I'm excited to continue this journey! ^_^

The Dark Hills Divide was written in first person, but had a little different feel than most books like that. It was more of a old-ish feel. Deep. A little slow at points; but all in all, very delicious! *grins* I'm not sure if I'm explaining it right ... but if everything turns out nicely in this series, I would absolutely adore to see it on my bookshelf!! It has a classical feel and a heart-warming story that just makes you want to give it a squeeze and recommend to fellow book-lovers!

Once again, very akin to Narnia. A lot of the feelings I got from reading this tale were kind of the same feelings I get from watching *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, *Prince Caspian*, and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Classic!

There were a few scary or slightly violent moments. But not much at all. When you look at the cover, you might expect a darker tale, but it didn't turn out to be quite like that. It had a solemn tone at times, but a lot of fun and intrigue involved as well. That being said, there is one scene toward the end that might frighten younger readers ... so caution.

The animals. I'm not sure how much I should say ... trying to avoid being spoiler-ish ... but they were so much fun. *grins*

Ah. What else can I say? I enjoyed it thoroughly! I'm looking forward to reading more! I'm captivated! *huggles book* Fans of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, you definitely must give *The Dark Hills Divide* a try. Also, those who like adventure and intriguing worlds beyond the normal, you'll probably love this tale!

Ann says

I wasn't able to read this book every day like I usually do with novels, so for a long time I attributed my lack of interest in it's characters, and my confusion regarding the plot, to the fact that I wasn't able to keep the flow. But the more I read the more confused I got (I was actually intrigued at the beginning) and the end left me scratching my head wondering what the point of the story was.

Like I said, the beginning was intriguing, governmental type meeting, a suspicious death, a riddle, a walled city, and the world beyond that our twelve-year-old girl protagonist, Alexa, is very curious about. But honestly, the details of the plot are so hard for me to even summarize because I don't really know what all happened. I think the basic plot is that the walled city faces dangers from the outside, and Alexa must find out who the "spy" within the city is.

There are talking animals (a very entertaining squirrel included) who've been separated by the wall (quite sad, and again, Alexa must help), and there's a fantastic library, and of course, the enjoyment of trying to figure out who the spy is. But the problem is, it's no fun if the author never gives you any clues to figure it out for yourself (or try to, even if you ultimately want to be surprised -- unless I can connect the dots after the fact, the "ta-da" isn't very exciting. Instead of showing how a character is guilty or not, I felt more that the reader was told, without really explaining why.

Alexa has very little introspection that we're privy to, so it's more that Alexa feels so-and-so isn't the spy and thus we must accept it. *Why* did Alexa trust (or not) certain people? And even after Alexa figures something out, the author won't tell the reader but drags it out to the last possible second for the "wow" factor (I'm guessing) but by that point I've lost interest and feel, in a way, cheated. I want to see how Alexa arrives at her decisions, not just be told that she's decided.

I wanted to like this book... but sadly it felt more like a chore to read. At least for me. I see the book has mixed reviews, so I'll have to read some of the more favorable ones to see what others found more enjoyable. Obviously the book resonates with some since this is part of a series.

Arwen says

I'm going to group my thoughts on this trilogy into one entry. Wow! What an introduction to Patrick Carman. This series is fantastic. A fantasy story about a young girl (I know, I know some of you signed just then because every other YA fantasy story is about a young girl who finds herself with some special power to save her world.) And yes this one starts out just the same. Alexa Daley is given a special stone and thrust into a world she doesn't know beyond the safe walls of her city with a destiny to save her world from a coming war. (Again I know you've heard all that before.)

What sets this series apart and makes it something you really want to read is the connection between the creator Elyon and his land and his people. The mystery behind that relationship keeps it interesting. Plus there are other mysteries; why were the walls built? Where is this evil influence coming from? Why are the leaders so secretive?... It starts out like those other YA fantasy stories but becomes a touching Christian allegory. I copied this passage as a small example of that:

"Elyon has only one hope for us Alexa. That we would know he loves us. Do you understand? The one who made you, the one who made everything... He loves you. And more than that, there is nothing you or I need do to earn his reckless affection for us. That love has driven me to fight his enemy the enemy of us all... I have failed, and failed, and failed again... But no amount of failure can move Elyon's hand of affection away from me. It's inescapable. To live bodily for that kind of love is the least I can do."

The visuals popped out from the pages and I was really able to get into the world of Elyon. He does a really great job with imagery and mood. You can not only see the world in your head you can feel it too.

Amalia says

The Dark Hills Divide takes us on an exciting and mysterious adventure as we explore the many walls within our lives. Some of these boundaries we impose upon ourselves, some are put upon us by the society in which we live; some are physical, and some are emotional.

The Land of Elyon is divided into four walled and gated cities joined to each other by walled roads. Every gate in every city is guarded. As far as everyone knows, there is no way to the "other" side of the wall.

Every summer, the leaders of each of the cities gather together in Bridewell, the central city in the land. Every summer, Alexa explores Bridewell (searching for a way beyond the wall) while her father attends to official business. This summer, Alexa's explorations will take her on an incredible journey of discovery. She will learn much about herself as well as those around her as she unravels the mystery of her society.

Carman entices us with his imagery and vivid descriptions. I can really visualize the Land of Elyon. I felt as though I was right there with Alexa every step of the way. I also enjoyed the thought-provoking ethical questions that arose throughout the book. Not the least of which is "What is the purpose of a wall?"

As far as I can tell, there are 5 books in this series, I am looking forward to reading number 2!

Deborah O'Carroll says

Re-read January 2017

The Bridewell library though. <3

Bix says

Alexa, a spirited, independent twelve-year-old growing up in a complex of walled villages, longs for adventure and a chance to see what lies beyond the walls' boundaries. When she discovers a secret passage, she gets her wish, and more adventure than she bargained for in the process. For Alexa has been chosen to save her home from dark forces which seek its destruction, and she must act quickly to unravel the mystery that lurks inside the walls and threatens everything she holds dear. This first volume in the Land of Elyon series is a recommended reader's advisory selection, with a strong female protagonist. For ages 9-12."

SPL Summary: "Twelve-year-old Alexa Daley is spending another summer in Bridewell with her father. As she begins to unravel the truth about what lies outside the protective barrier around Bridewell and towns nearby, Alexa discovers a strange and ancient enchantment, possibly the work of Elyon, the fabled creator of the land in which she lives."

SLJ: "Grade 4-6 [An] entertaining, accessible fantasy... There's nothing very original about the novel's preindustrial setting or appealing characters... However, the story moves along at a fine clip, with plenty of suspense and action to hold readers' interest."

Kirkus: "[A] real page-turner. Alexa, with her brains, courage and grit, proves to be an appealingly strong female hero and the story... is sure to engage reader interest... Here's a good high fantasy for the girls. Bravo!"

Sarah says

The "Land of Elyon" in the series title is a small nation of fearful settlements, surrounded by a wall. Of the settlements, Bridewell is the closest to the Dark Hills outside the wall, which the settlers speculate are full of criminals and monsters. Precocious twelve-year-old Alexa Daley is the daughter of the mayor of another settlement. Every summer her father goes to Bridewell to consult with the other mayors, and she tags along to scrounge the library for information on the outside world.

When she's not reading, Alexa pretends to be an explorer or detective. She won't need to pretend this year.

Content Advisory

Violence: A man plans a violent uprising which culminates in a siege, albeit with a low body count. The same man menaces a kid and tries to stab her with a poker. A brave squirrel is almost killed by two evil cats. (view spoiler)

Sex: An adult asks our heroine if she's ever kissed a boy. Just a weird question for a grown-up to ask a kid.

Language: None.

Substance Abuse: Pervis is frequently hammered. The book does not glamorize his drinking, but neither does it judge him for it. Alexa eventually concludes that he drinks to deal with the stress of his perilous job.

Politics and Religion: There are some Christian allegorical elements in this series. They are not obvious in this first book. I didn't find them preachy at all, but your mileage may vary.

Nightmare Fuel: Nothing in this installment, but plenty in the later books. Again, know your kids!

Conclusion

The first installment in Patrick Carman's Elyon series is a solid middle-grade adventure/fantasy/mystery with a well-crafted setting and palpable sense of dread. Alexa is a brave and clever kid who has a good relationship with her dad and other authority figures. She never puts on airs about her intelligence. Looks and boys are not on her radar yet. Despite being very mature in some ways, she's still a kid who loses her temper and gets distracted by "unspeakably gross" things.

The story certainly borrows elements of Narnia and Middle-earth, with perhaps a hint of *Alice*, but Carman does not lift enough from any single source that it ever feels like a rip-off. There's nothing terribly original here either, but it is definitely enough of its own thing to sustain interest, even for a fussy elder stateswoman like myself.

Carman says in his afterword that this story began as a serial for his daughters, and the book maintains a bedtime story quality. This should be great for kids 10 and up to read alone, and younger can enjoy it as a read aloud.

Kogiopsis says

So, my relationship with this book is weird. I was in fourth grade when it first came out, living in the same town as Patrick Carman, and in that small community it was a *big deal* to have a local author, especially when he got picked up by Scholastic. My teacher actually read this book aloud to the class - though I think it was actually the independent edition, in which Chapter 18 includes a bizarre detour into the world of dentistry. (You think I'm kidding? I still own that book, and I checked, just to make sure my memory wasn't malfunctioning.)

Anyhow - I've got a signed indie printing copy, a signed poster, and the first three books in Scholastic hardback, *and* I found out as I prepared to write this review that Carman and I also share an alma mater - but I'm not in fourth grade anymore, and this book didn't stand up to the test of time even with such a heavy nostalgia factor/personal connection.

A grain of salt: as Carman mentions in the afterword to this volume, the story was originally created to entertain his two young daughters, so a certain degree of absurdity or lack of coherence is understandable... or it was, until he got picked up by a Big 6 publisher.

I think that's the thing that it all comes down to, in the end. Independently published, this book would be a solid entry on the low end of middle-grade age ranges, with an adventurous young heroine who (I can vouch from personal experience) young girls can get behind. But as a book from a major house, there are just... too

many weaknesses. For one, the connection between the Land of Elyon and the world we know is vague*, but clearly there - one of the characters is named after a Hindu god. For another, the plot essentially relies on a whole lot of Idiot Ball-passing happening for *years* before the book takes place, as characters apparently knew who the Big Bad was, but did nothing to hinder his plans, and other characters *ignored* the warnings of those who had it all figured out. It's a tidy set-up for Alexa to come in and save the day, but it's not very plausible.

There are, however, some really neatly done aspects. In particular, the conclusion has a bittersweet tinge to it, as characters make choices/sacrifices that force them to grow beyond safe, understandable worlds. There's a sense of... the regret and the wonder that come with leaving childhood behind, and in that way you can really see the impact of Carman's original audience on the way the story was crafted, in the best possible way.

Two-star rating aside, I do think this is a book I would recommend to kids. It doesn't meet my standards as an adult reader, but it also doesn't bother me (even on a religious front - I'm an atheist and the book has some overtones of Christian allegory - nothing is pervasive enough to be a problem), and at the end of the day it's a fun adventure story that I know full well kids will enjoy.

(*This may well be addressed in one of the later books in the series; I've never read past 3, which is actually the reason for rereading now.)

Joey says

Perfect little fantasy adventure. Plus it has a talking squirrel. Easy 5 star.

Liana says

This was an odd little book... But charming nonetheless. It didn't always make sense, but gee... There's something magical about the world that pulls me in!

D.M. Dutcher says

Odd book about a girl named Alexa in a city entirely walled off from a forest down to the roads coming in and going out. The convicts who built the city and are abandoned outside are falling under the sway of a person named Sebastian, and plan to invade. It's up to Alexa and some talking animals to stop them.

There's just too many odd decisions and twists to make sense. They mentioned building the walls to stave off some evil, but what evil and why are the convicts immune to it? Why does Alexa need talking animals to stave off what is a rather mundane threat? Why does Elyon matter, or the fact that talking animals are finding it harder to talk? The world didn't really feel cohesive to me, but disjointed and with background information sadly missing. The author mentions that he told this first as a serial story to his daughters, and I think it shows.

It also ends rather abruptly, especially for a serial story as part of a trilogy. Without spoilers, you get the sense he thought there might only be one book, and rather than let it continue on, he felt he needed to resolve

one of the important parts a bit too quickly.

The writing isn't too bad, but the odd disjointed plot might throw you off. I can't really recommend it.

Jessie says

I've wanted to read this book since I first came upon it, however I didn't feel the story lived up to the beautiful cover.

The main character is Alexa, who at 12 years old stands a little over 4 feet tall and longs to discover what is beyond the walls surrounding her town. Using clues left behind for her, Alexa discovers tunnels into the wilderness and befriends animals who reveal a plot to destroy her home.

The biggest problem I had with this book was that it was an information overload, without really telling me anything. There were so many names of locations and characters that I didn't connect with any of them. Even at the end when a trusted character betrays Alexa, I didn't feel like I knew either character enough for it to impact me.

While this book had some interesting concepts, it was very easy to put down and out of mind. I probably won't read the sequel, but am intrigued to hear if the author is able to develop the characters and plot further.

Dimitra says

I still remember the moment I saw this book...

The cover caught my attention and felt like a great story to read. To be honest, I got all first three books at a book bazaar, just because of the cover!

Now, I've read the first book and I am beyond happy for my choice!!!

It's a bit middle-grade-ish but still, a great adventure of a little girl who never stops dreaming and living her life no matter what! She is an amazing character! Even though the book is written by a male author, the main character is female and fantastically written!!!

The story is like a fairytale. Beautiful scenery, amazing "heroes", plot twists and fun.

I am a really slow reader but I read this in a day, because it was so well written and fast paced.

Great for all ages, in my opinion.

Can't wait to see how the story continues and how much Alexa evolves as a character.

Despair Speaking says

The Dark Hills Divide is a simple fantasy book directed to children that has captivated my heart in more ways than I imagined. I do not know why I am so in love with this book; it has the same basic elements of other fantastical children stories and it doesn't really deviate itself from the norm. But the seaming of the lovable characters, the mysterious setting, and the adventure was so well done that it become a beautiful work.

We see from the point of view of Alexa, a gusty and curious girl who wishes to venture out of the walls that surround Bridewell. She had always wondered about what lies outside and her being close to Warvold, the

founder of Bridewell and the greatest adventurer of all time, isn't helping at all.

Warvold and Alexa were having one of their walks when Warvold suddenly tells her this strange poem about the Blind Men of Indostan. She is bewildered by this but doesn't really ponder on the poem (which is actually a clue to the identity of the antagonist as she later finds out). Warvold then murmurs on whether the walls he built around Bridewell was to keep the monsters out or to keep them in before promptly dying. Thus begins Alexa's tale filled with uncertain allies, talking animals, and dark secrets.

Erica Locke says

This book was just okay, in my opinion. I'm not saying that the story is bad or anything. I just really didn't connect to the characters or anything. So, I won't be continuing the series.

Sierrah O says

I really like this book because it is fantasy. I really don't know why i like fantasy. This book was really good because Alexa trys to save as many people as she can. She also is just a very caring person like me. The author really didn't explain much about it or what is happening in some parts. Like she told us who she was saving but like not how she saved them. Thats what I don't like about this book. I also like this book because she meets a lot of people who are like monsters but not exactly monsters. More like faries or so. Another thing I don't like about this book is she kind of tells you what is going to happen at the end. It was pretty good.

Nikoleta says

Ενα ?μορφο παραμ?θι. Αμα το ε?χα στα χ?ρια μου ?ταν ?μου πιτσιρ?κα, θα ε?χα ξετρελαθε?. Τ?ρα μου φ?νηκε λ?γο πιο αφελ?ς απ'οτι θα ?θελα. 3,5/5 αστερ?κια.

Jerome says

Alexa is apparently the ONLY child in existence, not to mention the only FEMALE in existence, given that her mother is on the periphery, only communicating through a letter, and that Renny is dead. Even Odessa, Darius' wife, has no speaking part. Alexa lives in a bizarre community of middle-aged men which is a just plain weird. Where are all the other children? I thought this was a kids book?

Alexa is, especially in the first half, far too passive a character. She is told what to do by adults or animals and then she goes ahead and does it. There's little sense of adventure or danger in what she does and simply declaring her adventurous or heroic or frightened doesn't make her so. The land outside the walls is covered pretty perfunctorily so it never really comes alive for us. The same is true of the land inside the walls, where we meet relatively few people (all of them seemingly old or middle-aged men--where are the women and children?) and get very little sense of culture.

The plot is also problematic. As mentioned above, there is little sense of danger or suspense for the first half

of the book; the arduous journey/quest Alexa makes is mostly conveyed through telling us it's arduous and by describing her blisters.

Re-reading in high school after having read it in elementary school makes these things more obvious, but for any elementary student, this is a great read.

Tereza says

Moje recenze: <http://sheisbookaholic.blogspot.cz/20...>
