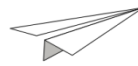


Dark Time: Mortal Path Book One

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Feedback Notes

DARK TIME: MORTAL PATH (BOOK ONE) is an ambitious and creative fantasy/science fiction adventure novel with a terrific lead protagonist and a dense mythology. The project is properly suited for television. Susannah/Maliha is a well-developed lead character with tons of agency and depth. Her exposition-heavy but engaging opening sequence is melodramatic but well-written, with confident, brutal detail. Maliha is essentially absolved of all future wrong-doing because of her suffering, so when the writer chooses to imbue her with a sense of moral conflict when she refuses to kill the accountant, it's an honest moment of characterization and one that speaks well to Maliha's relatability and growth. Her eventual 'quest' is defined with clarity, though at times perhaps somewhat awkwardly delivered, but it is nonetheless compelling and well done.

Based on the attached synopsis, the supporting cast is nicely diverse and well-defined; essential ingredients for a television adaptation. The opening 50 or so pages work well as a pilot to the show: introducing the magical elements and defining Maliha's adventure while escalating the stakes and keeping the plot moving. Though Susannah/Maliha's suffering is brutal and intense and this could be off-putting to certain audiences, the writer makes sure there's an intimate connection between the reader and Maliha, which makes her tragic backstory engaging rather than cliché. Production companies will likely not be particularly put off by this, as shows like GAME OF THRONES and WESTWORLD have proven that audiences can put up with watching almost anything as long as the characters and narrative are truly compelling. In terms of adaptation, the project feels more suited for television than film. Because the plot is so dense and complicated, with so many side stories, it feels too big for a single film and, based on the attached synopsis, there aren't clear markers where the story could be interrupted and broken up for a series of films. There would also need to be a more clearly defined antagonist for a film. However, many of those problems with a film adaptation are the reasons that a television adaptation would work well. The huge plot could be divided up with clarity and patience, and the side characters could come alive. An hour-long drama format suits the story well. The writer does a good job, in outline form, with the character of Jake, Maliha's love-interest. His eventual reveal of having supernatural powers speaks to the writer's confidence in their mythology and awareness of the power of long-form reveals. This reveal also sets up another season. Maliha is definitely a character worthy of lots of attention and the Sumerian-mythology rich universe is one that could be mined on television for many seasons. Overall the project is in excellent shape, creating vivid, relatable characters with lots of room to grow. While the novel may be too big a film, it has a great television feel and would likely fit right at home on a cable network looking to expand their genre material.

DARK TIME: MORTAL PATH BOOK ONE
by Dakota Banks

What if a woman sells her soul to an ancient Sumerian demon
and three hundred years later wants it back?

Dark Time is a suspenseful thriller laced with ancient legends, a frightening scenario that could be tomorrow's headlines, a heady dash of the paranormal, and a generous dollop of romance. Maliha Crayne is a unique, action-oriented, sensual, and multi-faceted heroine.

"Sometimes you just need a kick-ass former demon's slave to tackle life's problems. Especially one wielding a whip sword. *Dark Time* is a novel to be savored for both its edge of suspense and the pure joy of its storytelling. Part immortal, all human, Maliha is a heroine who will leave readers breathless and craving more. Not to be missed!" – **James Rollins**, #1 *NYT* Bestselling Author

"Nonstop action, a twisting plot, and a deadly heroine ... clever and compelling!" – **Lisa Gardner**, #1 *NYT* Bestselling Author

"A breakneck ride through worlds visible and invisible." – **Joseph Finder**, *NYT* Bestselling Author

"Seductive, sophisticated, and imaginative, *Dark Time* has a multi-dimensional quality with beguiling concepts and a labyrinth of fast-paced suspense." – **Steve Berry**, *NYT* and #1 Internationally Bestselling Author

"Chilling, thrilling, and a page turner!" – **Heather Graham**, *NYT* Bestselling Author

"Storytelling at its most vivid. Curl up in your favorite chair – entertainment is guaranteed." – **Gayle Lynds**, *NYT* Bestselling Author

"Dark Time is a passionate, fascinating story packed with action and history." – **David Morrell**, *NYT* Bestselling Author and creator of Rambo

"The premise for this new series is exciting. With a kick-ass heroine trying to get out of an unimaginably bad situation and tons of action, this is a terrific read. – **Romantic Times Book Reviews**

"A great concept and a fun read; an original story with just the right blend of action, suspense, mythology, and romance." – **Book Bitch**

"Maliha is a mix of Lara Croft and a human Terminator. A series with a strong, intriguing story line." – **Catherine Tuckwell**, **Blogcritics**

Synopsis

DARK TIME: MORTAL PATH BOOK ONE

DARK TIME is a suspenseful thriller laced with ancient legends, a frightening scenario that could be tomorrow's headlines, a heady dash of the paranormal, and a generous dollop of romance. Maliha Crayne is an action-oriented, sensual, and multi-faceted heroine.

Susannah Layhem, a healer unjustly accused of witchcraft in the 17th century, is ripped from her husband's arms and thrown in jail. Alone and desperate in the dark jail cell, she gives birth in what should have been a joyous event, the beginning of her life as a mother. Instead, her daughter Constanta is stillborn because of rough handling by the jailers. Susannah is tied to a stake and set afire, but her raging bitterness attracts the attention of one of seven ancient Sumerian demons. The demon pulls her from the flames, and she makes a pact to live forever—if she does the demon's evil work in the world of men. She becomes the Black Ghost, an Ageless assassin.

The demon Rabishu grants her enhancements such as rapid healing of wounds, seeing auras that tell her when she's being deceived, and the ability to experience the psychic imprints left at the scenes of violent death. A master martial artist, she uses many weapons but favors swords, throwing knives, and a diabolical weapon called a whip sword—a flexible, double-bladed sword she wears wrapped around her waist.

For three centuries, she obeys the demon's bidding, and remains a beautiful twenty-five-year-old woman with a taste for indulgent living, an eclectic collection of treasures from her travels around the world, and a revolving door on her bedroom.

Her loyalty to Rabishu and her way of life is shaken in the 1900s. Her target is a mob accountant who will provide evidence against his boss in return for having his wife and children spirited safely out of the country. She's been ordered to prevent the accountant from testifying. As part of her research, Susannah visits the man's home and finds herself identifying with the mother and children she finds there—the kind of life she expected to lead centuries ago, the life that was snatched away from her by a false accusation of witchcraft. She prevents the accountant from testifying, not by killing him as expected, but by arranging for him to join his family abroad.

A few years later, she's assigned to assassinate a rising politician. In a twist of events, she ends up

killing him in front of his very pregnant wife, whom she didn't know was present in the house. Under the lash of the woman's hatred, Susannah delivers the baby, who would have died without her help. At least this baby lived, while her own had died.

Testing her, the next target Rabishu gives her is an innocent baby.

In a moment of awakening triggered by the long-ago death of her own baby and everything that has happened to her recently, she refuses to carry out the order. She believes she will immediately die. Instead, she finds that by her defiance, she's chosen the mortal path and is no longer one of the Ageless. If she commits as much good as she has evil, she'll ascend to a paradise straight out of Sumerian legend. If she fails, she faces eternal torment at the hands of the demon.

The ticking clock? Every time she saves a life, she ages an unpredictable amount, maybe a day, maybe a month... Her progress toward her goal is marked, life by life, on a balance scale burned into her body by the demon. When she saves a life, the scale comes alive to record the deed. Her Ageless speed and rapid healing are diminished, but not gone. She fears that she'll die before she gets a chance to balance the scales. The only way for her to succeed, ironically, is to work toward her own death by continuing to save lives.

Half a century later, she lives in Chicago, where she maintains two homes: one as a public residence she takes visitors and one as her safe haven, heavily fortified and guarded by security measures that require her supernatural speed for entry. To provide a cover identity so she can move easily around the world—and use a credit card at the grocery instead of dumping a bag of diamonds on the counter—she writes luridly sexy pulp novels that have exploded in popularity. She's now Maliha Crayne, writer/warrior, and she's as reckless in her new pursuits as she was when working as an assassin for the demon. Her quest for balance of the scales is echoed by her inner search to learn more about the kind of person she is—and is becoming—freed of the demon's domination.

She gathers a trio of assistants: a computer hacker, a refugee from the Chinese Revolution, and a Vietnam vet with shadowy government connections. She saves each of their lives, and they're fiercely devoted to her. Amaro Reese, the computer expert, is taken from a slum in Rio de Janeiro just as he and his sister were about to be killed by gang members. Xia Yanmeng is facing a death sentence in a Chinese prison when he and his wife are spirited out of the country by Maliha. Yanmeng has the extraordinary ability of remote viewing, a type of clairvoyance. Hound is the nickname of a medic she saves during the Vietnam War. He's disfigured from his war injuries and is now a private investigator—or is it mercenary?—with clients in the political arena and in the defense department. She shares a deep bond

with her team, and in Hound's case, she shares his bed, too.

She has a friend outside her trio, a young woman named Randy Baxter who knows nothing of Maliha's true background. Maliha thinks of Randy as her parallel self in the normal world. Randy is twenty-six, intelligent, not nearly as devoted to her exercise regimen as Maliha, and tends to take her horoscope a bit too seriously. She works as a business analyst in a Chicago corporation, but intends to quit her job and start a green company any day now. Randy grounds Maliha in the world of twenty-something women.

She loves them all, because love has so many ways of expressing itself.

In addition to the goal that is emblazoned on her body, Maliha seeks to collect seven artifacts dating from ancient Sumer, which is currently Iraq. The artifacts, shards of an incredible diamond, are hidden around the world, and she must risk her life to find each one. When placed together, the shards will unite to become a lens to translate writings that reveal the fatal weakness of each of the seven demons. With the power of that knowledge, she can wipe them all from the earth and remove the vast amount of pain and suffering they cause for the human race.

A trip to Peru ends in the retrieval of one of the shards, a battle for control of a plane in flight, and a crash in the Andes. A hazardous visit to a secret cave in the Taklimakan Desert in central Asia yields the Tablet of the Overlord, the stone document that needs to be translated. Six more diamond shards await discovery.

Among these lofty goals, Maliha has a very personal one. She longs for love, a husband and children, but love seems to elude her. In any case, how can she justify bringing a man into her life when she's fighting demonic and human forces on such a grand scale?

Then along comes Jake, whom she meets on a blind date contrived by Randy. There is an instant spark between Jake and Maliha, but Maliha needs a lot of convincing.

She begins to believe she can love again, but the target of her affections, Special Agent Jake Stackman of the Drug Enforcement Administration, has five years mysteriously missing in his life. His aura indicates a serious touch of evil in his past and an uncertain future—much like hers. Was he recruited and trained as a demon's servant during those five years? It could be that his desire to be close to her is rooted more in keeping her from achieving her goals than in love.

Jake falls hard for her, even though he thinks she's dangerous and mysterious—or maybe because she's dangerous and mysterious. He's watched her single-handedly break into an armed compound and escape from the roof by gliding away with a parachute—his type of woman.

Greg Shale is the owner of a company that has sold a computerized system to the U.S. government. The system, called Critical Energy Supply Redistribution (CSER), creates a vast grid, of suppliers and consumers of power. When power is lost or low in one part of the country, CSER routes power there from an area of the country that has a surplus, resulting in an uninterrupted, secure power supply for the entire country—including critical Homeland Security response systems.

Shale created a back door to CSER that only he knows how to use, and he can manipulate the grid with pinpoint accuracy, blacking out a city block or a hundred cities at will. Terrorist activities can flourish in the resulting “dark time”. His method, along with America’s security, is for sale to the highest bidder.

Maliha investigates the deaths of two programmers who worked on Project CSER, not knowing that their deaths are the tip of a very black iceberg. To protect his valuable secret, Shale’s wiping out everyone concerned with the development of the project who might have an inkling of its true nature. Maliha follows the blood trail, hoping to halt the spiral of deaths emanating from CESR.

As she narrows her search to Shale, she’s opposed by his ruthless bodyguard Subedei. A martial arts sparring demonstration with Subedei turns serious as he presents a genuine challenge to her skills, a rarity for her. Suddenly forced to counter with a burst of supernatural speed, she severs Subedei’s hand. He calmly sticks the hand back in place, and as she watches, the wound heals. It’s something she could have done when she worked for the demon, but she doesn’t heal that fast now. Subedei is one of the Ageless, a Mongolian warrior over seven hundred years old, and he’s as powerful as she used to be before she took the mortal path.

Subedei’s protecting Shale, but he also plays a nasty game of cat-and-mouse with her, stalking her and threatening her friends, and making it clear that he intends to possess her when the CESR business is finished. Given his advantage as one of the Ageless, she’s well aware that he’s not going to bring her flowers and ask her out to dinner.

Maliha’s task is made much more complicated and dangerous by the presence of Subedei. Her search for the nature of CESR takes her on a return trip into Shale’s heavily guarded compound through the secret escape tunnel he’s installed. She makes her way stealthily through a “building within a building,” a warren of rooms architecturally isolated from the public portion of the Shale business center. Maliha discovers that Shale has gathered terrorist leaders from around the world to bid on Project CESR. It takes all her skill and wits to stay alive when she faces off against him and his Ageless bodyguard. She wipes out the assembled terrorists and kills Shale, putting an end to the back door use of CESR. She barely

manages to kill Subedei by tricking him and blowing his body to bits. The Ageless are tough to kill.

Her success has come at a price. She's severely wounded. Maliha uses Shale's escape tunnel to get out of the compound. Waiting for her at the other end is Shale's chief of security, an evil man who sees opportunity in the death of his boss. Weakened and barely moving, she's taken by surprise. The security chief is about to kill her when Hound shows up, even though Maliha had ordered him to stay away. He blasts the security chief and carries away Maliha, now unconscious.

After recovering from the wounds she's endured and digging into her feelings about Jake, she feels it's time for some honesty with him. She hasn't decided just how much to reveal about herself. It's a decision that will be made based on whether he's willing to be open with her about the shadow of evil she's glimpsed in his aura and his five unaccountable years. She has to know whether he's just another man temporarily in her bed or whether the feelings building inside her are part of a new journey.

When she arrives at her safe haven and successfully navigates the supernaturally augmented security measures, she discovers that Jake is inside.

The clever trap in the entry hall is lethal to those with mere human speed. Why is he still alive?

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