



The Walls of Air

Barbara Hambly

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Three thousand years before, the monstrous Dark had sprung from loathsome underground lairs to destroy most of humanity. Now they were again ravaging and ruining in their blood-hunger. Only a few thousand people had managed to find refuge in the ancient fortress Keep of Renweth.

There, even the magic of the wizard Ingold Inglorion could offer them little hope against the Dark.

To defeat the savage horror, they must gain help from the Hidden City of Quo, to which all other wizards had been summoned. But Ingold could not pierce the walls of illusion that separated Quo from the world. With his student, Rudy Solis, the old wizard set out to cross two thousand miles of dangerous desert to the City of Wizards.

What he might find there he could not know -- and dared not guess!

The Walls of Air Details

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From Reader Review The Walls of Air for online ebook

Michael Manning says

I loved this trilogy.

Rebecca says

This is the second book in a series with all that usually entails -- its primary use is a bridge, I suspect. There is a great deal of traveling from one location to another, lots of studying and exploring and question-answering, with occasional instances of action. So in that respect, it is fairly standard.

But it's written by Barbara Hambly, and she continues to provide writing that is exceptional in its readability hand-in-hand with characters (and a world) that are complex and easy to love.

A very satisfying mid-80s fantasy, and I look forward to the conclusion of the series.

Johannes Herrmann says

This is the second book in the series that introduced me to my favorite author. I love how Hambly sets up her world, and especially her magic system. Having everyone, both good and bad, human and non-, have sensible motivations really sells it for me, although some are discovered quite late (as it should be).

Ambre says

I read this series from start to finish without putting it down. That really says it all in terms of the pacing and suspense elements. As a thriller, this is a 5 star book.

The weakness to me lies in the character development, specifically in the romances. They are not really central to the series, but apparently are required elements, so they are there. To me, they don't really work. In writing, for a romantic relationship to work, the characters need chemistry. Just saying that they get a jolt when they touch doesn't create chemistry.

I was also disappointed in the direction of the Gil character. Rather than finding herself, it felt like she lost something.

Libby says

This second installment of the Darwath 'Trilogy' (in much the same way the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy series is a trilogy) is a romping adventure. The first book, The Time of the Dark, is so intense and fraught

with terror, that I love this second book because it simply gives us a bit of a breather.

The intensity of our two main heroes' first introduction to the realm of Darwath is rubbed raw, and we can see them settling into their roles in their new (temporary) home. We get to know the citizens of the realm in a bit more detail which is nice to flesh out the other people surrounding the main story. We also get to see more of the motivations and characteristics behind other people in this story, lovingly detailed and intimately portrayed with the clean sharpness of Gil's side-stroke.

The only complaint I have of this novel is it detracts a bit into a Tolkiennesque overly-detailed landscape portraiture. It bored me to tears sometimes. Which is strange, because these same lands get the same infinite detail inspection in one of the later novels, *Icefalcon's Quest*. However somehow the investment of Icefalcon's personality and purpose behind that deep inspection of his surroundings gives it much more life than the ones here in *The Walls of Air* from the perspective of Rudy. In general, the travel time of Rudy and Ingold up until their encounter in Quo felt forced and just off for some reason, and I can't pinpoint why. Could just be my imagination.

Either way, Barbara doesn't let us down! There are still amazing shocks and plot turns that will spin your head around. I remember during my first read of this book back when, I had to re-read certain passages because I just had to be sure, is that what happened? No let me check again...

And again, amazing characters! Barbara Hambly not only stays true to the character developments in the first book, she manages to show them in this second one in a period of transition and change that is believable, subtle, and insightful. A great adventure! A great chance to take a deep breath! Because you're going to need it in the third book!

Julie Davis says

You can't stop at just one. One of the trilogy, that is. Having picked up *The Time of the Dark* after many years' absence, I plunged right into this book. Once again I am really enjoying the excellent storytelling and the details that I'd forgotten. Most of all, however, I love being immersed in this world and adventure.

Bibliophile says

I'm loving this old fantasy series I stumbled upon. In this second book Ingold and Rudy set off to the city of Quo to get help against the Dark ones. For a couple of wizards, they sure have to put up with a lot of shit on the way. I like that they're not able to solve every problem with magic, but you'd think they'd device some spells to ward off hungry neanderthals and dragons.

Meanwhile Gil, now part of the royal guard, stays on at the Keep and buddies it up with Queen Alde. Gil still identifies as a scholar, we're told a bunch of times, and spends many scholarly hours investigating old records trying to figure out who built the Keep and how. I'm expecting major discoveries in the next book. She's also pining over Ingold, which I find worrisome. He's old and bearded, it'd be like having sex with Gandalf.

These books are dark and funny and occasionally scary, and I wish I'd found them when I was a kid.

Wealhtheow says

Part two of the Darwath trilogy, which was written in the early eighties. Rudy and Gil are still trapped in a medieval fantasy realm on the verge of complete collapse. A tiny portion of the population is holed up in the Keep of Dere, a mysterious black keep built before recorded history. The social order is slowly collapsing, which makes the power struggles all the more vicious. Rudy and the powerful wizard Ingold set out to get help from the remaining wizards, while Gil and Queen Minalde remain behind, trying to investigate the Keep's secrets while maintaining the tense community. I skipped whole sections of Rudy and Ingold's trek across the kingdom, because A) I don't buy Rudy as a character and B) long descriptions of the land=unreadable. The other problem I had was that it seemed like every other page, one character of the other was described as "going pale" or "becoming white with strain" and then the unimaginable pain and suffering they were going through was described. I agree that the characters are heroes—I don't need them to perpetually comment on how heroic they all are. I found it increasingly annoying. All that said, this is good solid fantasy, complete with fairly unique characters, a well-developed world, and a compelling danger.

S. Nemo says

While we are no closer to finding out who or what the enemies are, the worldbuilding is much more fleshed out. Tragedy rises as well. It seems rather hopeless, but everyone is fighting, and despite it all they're still optimistic of their own fate. Let's see what happens next.

Kate says

I first read this series in (cough) 1986 at the age of 14 or so and it gripped me and scared me witless in equal measures. Rereading it as an adult, it doesn't scare me quite as much, but it's still a wonderful series with well drawn characters including one of the best gandalf-type wizards in contemporary fantasy, all the better because he is NOT infallible.

I think one of the best dynamics in this particular world is the uneasy relationship between the church and the wizard community and the way that the state falls between the two. None of your Harry Potter-type back-room government shenanigans here as the wizards are considered to be the agents of the devil by the church, yet they are not condemned by the state.

The Dark of the title are a protoplasmic being that have "risen" from their lairs. The whole of this series asks the question why? Why did the Dark rise and what can be done. The way that Hambly deals with this is fascinating as it's not just a "humans good, unpleasant people-killing protoplasmic beast bad" situation.

Despite the "real-world" sections of this book being very obviously set in the 1980s, the series does not suffer from feeling too dated by this. I highly recommend the series.

Jennifer Gaarder says

The Walls of Air is an exceptional book. Not only does it progress the story of the people struggling against the ravages of the Dark zones, but it casts a light on the characters more giving them more shape.

Barbara Hambly is a fantastic writer and storyteller. I had no idea that the Darwath series was written in the 80's as her first books and I was surprised that they were so good.

This book is a roller coaster ride from beginning to end. The ending leads to an opening for the next book in the series as there is no clean ending in this one.

Bookwraiths says

Great continuation of the Darwath Saga. Barbara Hambly doing an amazing job using the standard 1980s fantasy tropes in creative, unexpected ways, as well as crafting deceptively well-rounded and realistic characters in Gil, Rudy, Ingold, and Minalde. And the easter eggs! Man are there easter eggs everywhere in this one, but you never are quite sure how to take them until Hambly brings it all together in the final book. Can't wait to dive into book three!

Sineala says

It's rare that I like the second book of a trilogy more than the first, but I suppose that The Walls of Air here is an exception -- I almost considered giving up after the first book. Oh, I liked the characters and the worldbuilding well enough, because Hambly is always good at that, but the plot seemed to meander and I felt like I wasn't quite invested enough in where it was going.

This book basically hands you all the investment. It's a quest story, split two ways -- Rudy and the wizard Ingold go off in search of more wizards to fight the Dark while Ingold trains him, and meanwhile Gil and Queen Minalde stay at the Keep of Dare trying to figure out if there is anything hidden within it that would be a clue to fighting the Dark. I always like scenes of wizardly training, and it was nice to see Gil actually get to be a historian, and what they find out is pretty cool. And I love the revelation that Ingold is or at least has been capable of monstrous things. All the characters are very well-drawn, even the minor ones -- I think everyone loves the Icefalcon -- and I can't help but admire the Bishop even though she's basically standing in the way of the fight. And that monk with magic? Poor guy.

Also, um, I may be shipping Gil/Ingold and I'm not sure if I'm supposed to but the Windrose Chronicles primed me pretty well for this.

Joel Flank says

A solid second entry in the Darwath trilogy, the Walls of Air continues the story of Gil and Rudy as they

settle into their roles in the fantasy world across the void. Rudy accompanies the wizard who brought them there, Ingold on a desperate quest across frozen tundra to the magical city of Quo, which has been mysteriously cut off from the rest of the world. Without the aid of the archmage and other wizards, there is little hope to resist the incursion of the alien Dark who have destroyed most civilization in the north, killing, kidnapping, and eating the minds of any they catch. Rudy not only hopes he can help, but that Ingold will teach him to use the wizardry he has discovered he can also command.

Meanwhile, Gil tries to help the Guard keep peace as the survivors settle into the mysterious ancient Keep of Dare which is enspelled to keep the Dark out. That is insufficient for protecting them against the baser human nature of those in the keep itself though. Greed, power, and religious persecution all threaten the precarious balance of the refugees. Her training as a graduate student might prove useful if she can research how the ancient ancestors who built the keep actually defeated the Dark thousands of years ago, assuming she can keep everyone alive in the meantime.

Hambly does a good job keeping the story moving along, and breaking cliches throughout. Fights are wearing and brutal, whether with swords or magic, and the biggest threats of humanity's dark side is realistic and more dangerous than the pervasive dread of the alien Dark which threatens all of humanity.

William Leight says

"The Walls of Air" is perhaps a slight letdown from "The Time of the Dark", mostly because it's a transitional book: we're given hints -- in particular about the origins of the Keep and the magical engineering that keeps it going, the possible relation between the Dark and wizardry, and the nature of the Dark -- but we're clearly being set up to be given the big revelations in the 3rd book, when presumably the Dark will be defeated and all will be well. Mostly "The Walls of Air" allows us to see new sides of the characters. Gil, who we previously knew mostly in her newly-acquired capacity as a warrior, is allowed to display her scholarly side again, as she researches the history of the Keep and investigates its workings. (She gets a couple of opportunities for heroism, too, just to keep her hand in.) In this she is aided by Alde, who is starting to come out of her shell and assert herself, in particular against her brother. Meanwhile, Rudy slowly turns into a wizard, even if he's not quite cut out for the heroic stuff just yet, and even Ingold isn't perfect for a few chapters, although it takes the weight of a considerable tragedy to reduce him to this condition. Lesser characters get the treatment as well: most notably, we see Alwir be heroic, if only briefly, and Bishop Govannin gets to show her human side (and the Church is further humanized by the appearance of the not quite so fanatical Bishop of Penambra, leading what's left of that city). If, for the most part, this book is intended simply to set us up for the climax, it does its job well, and Hambly manages to inject a certain amount of suspense into Rudy and Ingold's trip to Quo even though we are already well aware that nothing good will come of it.

The one false step is the introduction of the Empire of Alketch, which is just Tolkien's Harad or Lewis's Calormen, a barbaric and cruel southern empire of dark people. You'd think an actual medieval historian writing in the mid-'80s would know better than to contrast a relatively enlightened and progressive white north with a brutal and fanatical dark south, but I guess some habits are hard to break. Hambly's only innovation is to have Alketch's Church be the same as Darwath's, rather than have them worship a terrible false god, as Lewis and Tolkien do, but as it's implied that they are far more fanatical about their beliefs than the northerners, the end result is pretty similar. However, the envoy from Alketch only really plays a role for a single chapter, so for the most part you can ignore this particular slip-up and just enjoy the story.

