



# Pitch Dark

*Courtney Alameda*

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## **Pitch Dark** Courtney Alameda

Set against a future of marauding space scavengers and deadly aliens who kill with sound, here is a frightening, fast-paced YA adventure from the author of the acclaimed horror novel, *Shutter*.

Tuck has been in stasis on the *USS John Muir*, a ship that houses Earth's most valued artifacts—its natural resources. Parks and mountains are preserved in space.

Laura belongs to a shipraiding family, who are funded by a group used to getting what they want. And they want what's on the *Muir*.

Tuck and Laura didn't bargain on working together, or battling mutant aliens who use sound to kill. But their plan is the only hope for their crews, their families, and themselves.

In space, nobody can hear you scream . . . but on the *John Muir*, the screams are the last thing you'll hear.

## **Pitch Dark Details**

Date : Published February 20th 2018 by Feiwel & Friends

ISBN : 9781250085894

Author : Courtney Alameda

Format : Hardcover 378 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Horror, Science Fiction, Space

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# From Reader Review Pitch Dark for online ebook

## K. says

Trigger warnings: violence, gore, blood, death, death of a friend, death of a parent (in the past).

So here's the thing: I read the blurb of this and was like "Space ships + monsters + pending doom? THIS IS GOING TO BE LIKE ILLUMINAE!!!". Also, I lost my mind over this cover - the stars, the skull (which is \*very\* Silence in the Library), the sound wave? It's glorious.

And probably I built it up too much in my mind, buuuuut I did not love this. It was almost like it was trying to do too much? Don't get me wrong, I really liked our two protagonists, and I loved the concept of monsters that kill with sound. I loved how diverse it was, and I did like the writing.

But. We had a hacker plot. We had a spaceship full of monsters. We had a technology-caused industrial sabotage plot. We had a spaceship-transporting-Yosemite-National-Park plot. We had a romance. We had a we-have-to-save-the-spaceships-or-we'll-all-die. There was just...a LOT going on.

I think I loved the stuff where Tuck was running through the tunnels trying to escape from the monsters more than anything else. Add in a somewhat abrupt ending and...I just didn't love it, tbh. Womp.

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## Bentley ★ Bookbastion.net says

*See this review and more like it on [www.bookbastion.net](http://www.bookbastion.net)*

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Back in the springtime of my youth, when I still had time for hobbies outside of reading like video games, I was a rather big gamer. I played them all, and still have a pretty sizable collection of games that my book collection has of course far surpassed. One of my favorite gaming series was Dead Space, which was a pulse-pounding, terrifying and atmospheric sci-fi horror game set aboard a space station in the throes of an unstoppable danger consuming the passengers trapped within its walls.

Coming across this book at the bookstore was a lot like coming across Dead Space again. Even the premise is quite similar to the premise of the games: **a destructive alien force sweeps through a space ship, twisting its inhabitants into terrifying monsters.** As a fan of horror and sci-fi blends in general, I know I'd appreciate this book for what it was. I just can't help feeling like it could have been something more, had it been given a bit more of a chance to develop.

If you love stories that have constant action, you'll likely really enjoy this. The story begins with a bang immediately in chapter one, and is just relentless from that point on. The plot movement never lets up until the end.

**Alameda did a wonderful job infusing a story about death and despair aboard a derelict spaceship with a breath of life that I was honestly quite surprised by.** It's entertaining for sure, but there were some downsides to the story within all that momentum that I can't overlook.

There are a number of plot holes caused by the fact that the story never takes the time to slow down and provide explanations. For example:

**What exactly happened to the ship in the first place that turned a fair chunk of its crew into monsters?**

This seems to get almost totally ignored until the last action sequence of the book, when I guess what is supposed to be an explanation is delivered, but totally unexplored and just left me with more questions than answers.

**How did the nefarious eco-terrorist group, Pitch Dark, manage to survive for so long?**

Even their motives for wanting to commit crimes against humanity's chances of survival aren't explained very well.

**How the heck did any of the minor antagonists in this book manage to pull off the crimes they commit without being caught?**

Explaining the hows or whys of anything seem to fall by the wayside in favor of furthering the action and body horror scenes.

**Of all the characters in this book, the only one I felt connected to was Laura.** She is definitely the most fleshed out of all the characters in the book. Tuck is a little less impressive than Laura, given that he's basically just a walking pop-culture quote dispensary. I kind of cringed reading all the references to 80s movies and Doctor Who though. Teens might love it, but they felt out of place given the situation the characters were placed in.

Laura's storyline is the only one with any real gravitas, as it attempts to tackle what racism in the future might look like - what evils it might lead to as she is subjected to a different sort of body horror entirely when placed under the control of a body manipulating device called a Subjugator. This device gives her boyfriend and his affluent (and white) family complete control over her body, mind and voice. **It's a scary concept, for sure, but I felt like even this was underutilized by the end of the book.** Especially as Laura never utilizes moments when she's free of its control to her advantage.

Lastly, this book commits one of my least favorite cardinal YA sins: when teenage characters refuse to involve adult characters even when the situation is so dangerous that it calls for it.

The stakes are literally life and death every moment in this story, yet Tuck and Laura take it upon themselves to save the day. **Even when faced with opportunities to involve adults, to ask for help, the story cleverly side steps those opportunities.** I understand that it's young adult, but in a situation like the ones these characters were placed in, to have more than half the cast just sit back and let the two teenage characters

handle things feels inherently false.

**Teens can ask for help from adults. It's okay. It won't break the bank and ruin a young adult story.**

This is not a bad read. I thought it was entertaining for what it was. It feels like a novelization straight out of the Dead Space universe. For fans of action packed stories, or sci-fi horror, you will find something you like here. I just think it could have been more than it was.

**3 out of 5 stars**

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### **Kim M says**

When a terrorist organization crashes Laura Cruz's ship into the *John Muir*—a 400-year-old vessel designed to preserve natural resources from Earth during the crisis that drove humans from the planet—she finds herself having to face former-human monsters who kill by screaming, having to flee an unknown hacker who always knows where she is, and having to evade the wealthy family who use technology to try to control her. She happens to run into Tuck Morgan, an original crew member of the *John Muir* who has recently awakened from a multi-century stasis, and together they fight to save the severely damaged ship, its natural resources, and the surviving members of both crews.

I'm giving this book **3.5 stars**. It may not be as popular as some of the other YA books that have been released this year, but honestly, I think it's higher quality than a lot of them. With the exception of the fact that they put Yosemite National Park on a spaceship (yeah, you heard right, YOSEMITE IS ON A SPACESHIP—BLUE SKIES AND ALL), there aren't a lot of eyeroll-inducing aspects to the premise. This book has many strengths, many weaknesses, but overall, it's a pretty good book.

#### Mostly good stuff:

- (1) *The dialogue is great.* Everyone—Tuck especially—has a strong voice, and for the most part, nothing feels stilted. The dialogue is natural and people's personalities come through.
- (2) *The characterization is mostly good.* From the dialogue alone, I have a good idea of how each of the characters is. My only complaint is that, since so much of the book is spent silently running through tunnels or fighting monsters or almost dying in other ways, **there isn't a lot of time for the characters to really show who they are through actions.** Characterization through dialogue is great and important, but it's not the only aspect important to a personality. I want to see the characters interact with each other more and for there to be a variety of high- and low-intensity character- and relationship-building scenes. (We get some more of this toward the end, but I just really want more.)
- (3) *The Latinx representation is awesome.* The Latinx population does not get featured much in American literature, so it was refreshing to read a book where a Latina main character kicks some butt while letting her culture and heritage shine through. Also, the inclusion of Spanish words is fun.
- (4) *The buildup of suspense at a scene level is excellent,* especially toward the beginning. The first few encounters with the "mourners" are gripping. The rule is established: **you can't make a sound or they will find you.** Naturally, this rule leads to some highly suspenseful scenes structured in just the right way to make your heart beat quicker. However, once I was well into the book, the novelty of the mourners wore off, and due to (view spoiler), I just didn't think they were creepy anymore. It's like the author forgot that they were supposed to be scary and changed them from creepy terrifying monsters into minor annoyances.
- (5) *The terrorist organization, Pitch Dark, has a great motivation.* Humans destroyed the Earth, and now they're trying to colonize other planets. Rather than allow humanity to forge a path of destruction throughout

the entire universe, Pitch Dark wants them stopped and destroyed. So like, they're totally evil. But they're also... kind of right?

#### Problematic stuff:

- (1) *The beginning is a little bit slow moving.* To me, at least. I don't know what it is; maybe the fact that not much time is passing and so there's not time for much to happen besides the main plot of saving the ship? I definitely enjoyed a lot of scenes at the beginning, but it was a slow go for me. The scenes I liked were awesome, but the in-between stuff was a little boring?
- (2) *The romance is too fast.* I mean, I know traumatic situations can bring people together. But when two people have known each other for like two minutes and they're already thinking about how much they care about each other I just kinda roll my eyes. I have no problem with Tuck and Laura, but their interest in each other always feels forced upon them by the author to me.
- (3) *One of the "bad guy" groups is kinda lame.* The mourners are cool (at least at the beginning), Pitch Dark is cool, but the Smithson family feels like such a random addition. Like, the story would hardly change without them existing. In theory, I like the idea of having opposition from so many sides, but all the sides need to contribute in order for it to work. As it is, the Smithsons just try to control Laura, (view spoiler). Eluding the control of the subjugator is far too easy, and they're SO obvious about it that I don't know why no one has discovered it before.
- (4) *Speaking of the subjugator, I don't understand why it's even there.* It could be a really cool addition—a piece of parasitic technology that forces you to obey your oppressors and prevents you from revealing its presence to anyone—but it literally didn't do *anything*. **Laura always manages to wriggle out of her commands before any real harm is done**, whether by finding loopholes or using sheer willpower (um, okay?). I mean, come on. If this awesome device is secretly trapped under Laura's skin, **I want to see it cause a disaster**. I want Laura to actually do something terrible, to perhaps be seen by witnesses and be a real fugitive. (Yeah, she technically already is a fugitive, but it doesn't really feel like it because it's never a serious issue.) Or she could do horrible stuff in secret and have no way to warn anyone. Just, SOMETHING. Something besides Sebastian SUPER OBVIOUSLY telling her to walk on her injured and bloody feet in front of people and Laura awkwardly obeying. (Like, dude, like, how come no one has figured this out yet? HE'S SO OBVIOUS.) Also, (view spoiler).

So there it is. This book does plenty of things well, has plenty of flaws, and is overall a pretty good book. I really hope more people pick it up.

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### Grace says

Edit: I've landed on giving this book a 4.5 out of 5. I don't fully understand why I want to give this book such a high rating but I honestly loved it in spite of all the things I disliked about it. Some of my issues with it were on a more personal level and I feel like I shouldn't let that effect my overall rating when I loved and enjoyed most of this book.

I still cannot give this book a rating at this point in time but I'll settle on one eventually.

Anyways, this book follows two different people from vastly different times.

We have a young man named Tuck who's mother was a genius who helped to create exodus ships that carried vital soil for humanity that was going to be used as a way to preserve humanity as they abandoned the world they destroyed. However, due to several complications and a sudden need for his ship's crew to go

into stasis-him and all the other ships like his are assumed to be lost to space and everyone on those ships is presumed to be dead.

Then we have Laura Cruz. She is part of humanity years in the future and the present in this story as well. She is from a family of geniuses as well, archaeologists, and ship raiders. Her family preserves historical artifacts and is well loved and regarded by humanity. While humans are surviving in space without Earth they still desperately need the soil that was on the exodus ships like the one Tuck was on. Her family just so happens to find the *John Muir*-the ship that Tuck's family is on-they are on the verge of saving humanity to put it simply but something hinders this chance for victory.

This little dent in the plan results in mayhem ensuing that results in Tuck and Laura's world colliding. On top of this mutations reside on the *John Muir* that kill with sound and track through echolocation. With humanity on the brink of devastation and Tuck and Laura's lives and the lives of their ship crew and families at risk- this book is action-packed, intense, scary, and so enjoyable.

I will not sit here and say I hate this book because the truth is I thoroughly enjoyed this story. I loved Tuck in particular, he was my favorite character alongside Dejah who is not exactly human but it's whatever. I did like Laura to an EXTENT, I did have plenty of issues when it came to her and not necessarily just her. There was this sort of God complex around her like she is the most invincible character. I mean when Tuck first saw her he wouldn't shut up about how perfect she was-the rest of the story is everyone and their mother who isn't part of the Smithson's kissing Laura's ass.

It's not even that shes cocky either because she isn't but she is very headstrong which doesn't necessarily bother me unless it's like uncalled for-which I mean for most of this book it wasn't. I did have some issues with some of her earlier thoughts on white people at the start of the book and something said by her friend Alex later in the book.

This is where I am nervous about voicing my thoughts as I am kind of a minority when it comes to my political affiliation-I am moderate. I am not liberal. I am not conservative. But with that being said I am moderate because I've been on both sides of the political spectrum at some point in my life. When I was liberal I wound up really hating myself and I realize it's because I was getting a lot of my propaganda from tumblr and I was apart of *that* crowd. I wound up like really hating my skin color, hating how pale I am, I thought I was a monster and I had no control over it and no amount of apologizing for being white would like fix anything or make life better for those who are minorities.

I had some relapses with my mental health because I was exposed to so much hate for my skin color at a fairly young age. I don't know what snapped me out of it but something did. With that being said, I'm moderate now and don't really like the idea of anyone being targeted for their skin color and so on and so forth and the same goes for gender or sexuality. So some of Laura's remarks or thoughts near the start were a bit off-putting and upsetting for me because they brought me back to that time in my life that I really don't like remembering.

Then to top it off there is another scene where Tuck and Alex (one of Laura's friends) are trying to catch up to her. Tuck slips up and mentions saving her and Alex winds up going on this spiel about Laura not needing a white savior. Which just like why? I felt while reading that whole scene that that is not at all what Tuck meant. I saw it more as him worrying about someone he loves and wanting her to be SAFE. I know later on Tuck mentions how he was right she didn't need to be saved but legit after everything Tuck has seen Laura do...why would he ever think she needs saving even if what he said was something he just said out of worry. I don't think he would ever mean "Oh she needs my white ass to save her poor weak ass" no, no, no, and no.

Especially after Tuck has shown how much faith he has in Laura before this scene even happened. He literally talked about how Laura saved him and saved everyone on the ship and stood up for her when she wasn't there to speak for herself. He showed some crazy loyalty to her out there and Alex just assumes Tuck was trying to say Laura needs a white man to save her. Like how!? It doesn't fit with any of the things Tuck has previously done, said, nor witnessed and Tuck also isn't stupid so it just made no sense and felt really misplaced and silly to me that it even needed to be said.

It gets even sillier when later on Alex makes it sound like they need to save Laura which would greatly contradict what he was preaching about earlier.

Just this whole focus on Laura not needing anybody and being incredible was just kind of like so unnecessary. We already know she is great, she's shown it several times, it doesn't need to be said or thought like every other word. And these little spiels about how great she was, were also just so sudden and misplaced too. Like chill, we get it she's great.

Then we also have the blossoming of their relationship. It seemed natural from Laura's perspective but from Tuck's side, it was so unnaturally fast and obsessive and just no. It shows that Alameda had the ability to create a slow burn romance but really needed to show how great Laura was so it made it one-sided and weird and disjointed.

Then we also have some of the like plot holes that were bothering me throughout this book. We have Tuck's mother basically living on in a chip. But she is oddly like updated and self-aware and that is never explained. I know that she is a genius but it would've been nice to have this explained because even Laura was like shook. We also had this moment when all hell was breaking loose where Faye was acting weirdly and Tuck caught her and was like "she's acting". But in reality, she wasn't so that was just like why did Tuck think that because that was never explained ever and now that I'm looking back it it-it makes no sense whatsoever. I also feel like we never got a proper explanation as to what created the mourners or what happened to the *John Muir* for them to go into stasis for nearly 400 years.

Like I would have liked this story way more if some of the things I was really curious about were every like fully explained.

Now with all of that being said I actually enjoyed this story. I don't know why or how. I found so many things within it to be so ludicrous and out there but I think that is why I love Sci-fi. I think it is one of the more outlandish genres we have and I think it can create some of the more unique stories. I mean I adore The Generations Trilogy and that series blew my mind even if it was outlandish at times. I just like the boundaries that Sci-fi can push in all honesty.

On top of this, another aspect I appreciate is that it was diverse. I've been lucky enough to be exposed to Sci-fi novels that are typically diverse so this wasn't the first one I read with a variety of skin colors and culture within its pages. But it's nice to know that it's becoming a bit more common to include variety within Sci-fi where I know it used to be mostly white if not white all the time. I appreciate this book for that.

I also loved the intensity of this book, it may not be the most unique overall but it has so many different storylines going on that it creates an intense atmosphere. I found myself holding my breath in anticipation, cheering people on, getting scared and so much more. I did sometimes struggle with empathizing with certain characters but eh that isn't super important given that this story was all about the action for me. I did cheer the characters on of course but I wasn't as into the family factor as I think I was supposed to be so that resulted in me not being emotional when Laura was reunited with loved ones or when Tuck got to talk to his



mom.

Also, I do actually like Tuck and Laura as a couple I thought the last chapters were just super cute and precious. I also think there were bits of humor thrown in here and there that I think I should've appreciated more while I was reading it. I also just loved the action scenes even if sometimes I was confused as to what was happening visually-but that is a pretty common thing for me when it comes to sci-fi novels. I often struggle with visualizing everything and considering that I am no expert on spaceships that made it a bit harder as well. But it didn't hinder my experience.

I personally had so much fun reading this book even if I got frustrated here and there. My issues with it are big but they don't overpower how much I enjoyed this. So I can't come to a conclusion on my rating right now.

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## A Lib Tech Reads says

Pitch Dark

Courtney Alameda

**Rating:** 3/5

**Note:** Special thanks to Raincoast Books for providing a copy for review.

What a wild ride. If I wanted to describe this book in one sentence, it would be that Pitch Dark is essentially the Dead Space franchise on crack.

Packed full of action, horrifying monsters with interesting abilities and a POC female protagonist who is fully capable of handling herself, Courtney Alameda newest Science Fiction horror will have you either **hooked** or wanting to log back on to your favourite zombie/monster slaying FPS video game (I recommend *Killing Floor*).

It's tough writing a good horror story these days when everyone has become so desensitized to its effects, so when you come across one that puts you on edge, latch onto it and relish in that feeling. The concepts of the monsters were **the best part of the book**. Alameda truly created nightmare inducing and tentacle swarming aliens with a twist.

This was an interesting idea, however, I found myself getting distracted by all the action that was going on that I couldn't fully appreciate the finer details such as the advanced technology, the ships, or the history. Every time the narration seemed to be diving into explanations, something would happen to diverge from that. It was disappointing to say the least. There was also a useless romance thrown in there for kicks that I just wasn't rooting for. It again felt distracting to the main plot and it didn't add much for character development. I hate to say it, but even Sebastian and Laura's abusive relationship felt more interesting than Tuck and Laura's (it actually grosses me out that I feel this way because I do not condone abuse in any shape or form).

I would suggest this book to people who only want **non-stop action**. This would make an entertaining movie but on paper, it didn't do it for me.

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## Heidi says

Four stars: A thrilling and scary book, but there were a few too many plot holes.

Tuck wakes with a start. His muscles feel like jelly, and everything is wrong. Tuck finds himself surrounded by bodies and gore. Something must have gone wrong if the crew of the Muir is being awoken from stasis. Even worse, Tuck finds that four hundred years have elapsed. Tuck and his shipmates soon find themselves in a dire situation. The Muir is dying, and they are surrounded by mutant creatures who kill with sound. No one knows where they are, and there is little hope of rescue. Meanwhile, Laura Cruz is aboard a ship that looks for lost historic artifacts. Finding the Muir is a huge accomplishment, and the hope is that it can save humanity. Then things go horribly wrong, and Laura and Tuck find themselves thrown together as allies trying to save themselves and the rest of the human race. Will they succeed?

What I Liked:

\*Pitch Dark is a book that grabbed hold of me right from the beginning. I loved the terrifying setting, the frightening creatures, and the premise of being lost in the depths of space. This book is action packed and full of cliffhanger chapter endings, so prepare yourself for a lengthy reading session.

\*The world building is outstanding. I loved the setting of a crippled starship lost for centuries in the depths of space. The Muir is overrun with mutant, terrifying creatures that kill with deadly sound waves. The ship is dying, and the crew is trying to stay alive. It is dark, scary and thrilling. Loved it.

\*I liked both Tuck and Laura. Tuck is tired of fighting monsters and losing crew mates. He is fearless because at this point he has nothing to lose. He is fierce, flippant and a bit crazy. He is sometimes sarcastic and he has a thing for eighties culture. Laura is a competent computer hacker who finds herself in a sticky situation because she trusted her boyfriend. She is determined to set herself free. She is brave, smart and kind. I loved watching Tuck and Laura work together.

\*There is a lot going on in this book, and plenty of twists. I liked that there was hardly a moment to catch your breath in this one. The action never lets up. If you want an adrenaline packed thrill ride, this is one to try.

\*If you want just a touch of romance, this one has it. I liked that there wasn't a full blown romance, instead there is a friendship born from dire circumstances and then an mutual attraction that gently moves into something more.

\*The ending is solid. Everything ends satisfactory. Yet, there is a hint dropped that perhaps more is to come.

And The Not So Much:

\*I was completely sucked into this one and loving it, but then there were these little plot holes that started to bother me. Warning minor spoilers ahead:

First, there was the magic bow and arrow. As Laura flees from her ship to the Muir, she manages to grab a historic artifact, a bow and a quiver of arrows, to defend herself. The bow proves to be an excellent weapon, especially since it seems to have an inexhaustible supply of arrows. Laura is constantly firing off arrows, but she never stops to retrieve them. I googled it just for reference, an average quiver holds from 20-24 arrows or less. I guarantee she shot more than that.

\*It was too convenient that Laura barely survives her short traverse onto the Muir alone, but everyone else, including the bad guys made it safely without being attacked by monsters. A little too far fetched since the monsters seemed to be everywhere and a large group like that would have surely attracted plenty of attention before anyone on the Muir could have gotten to them.

\*A hacker can get in and suddenly hack a system that is four hundred years old, and the crew of the Muir allows these strangers access to the ship? I don't think so. Considering their situation, they would have been leery of outsiders, especially when you look at the way they got on the Muir. I found it completely

unbelievable that the hacker pulled off what they did.

\*When Tuck and Laura reunite with the crews after a mad dash through the terrors of the ship, Laura needs medical assistance. I thought it strange that Tuck didn't tell them about Laura's problem, especially when he witnessed it in action, along with Aren.

\*The "ghost in the computer" was a little far fetched, and it wasn't explained how it happened. I wanted more information on this part of the story.

Pitch Dark was a book I immediately fell into, I loved the story, the characters, the setting and the terror. However, as the story went along, there were a few too many plot holes and niggles that took away from my enjoyment. Still this was a thrill ride, and I was sucked in by the monsters, the action and the dire situations. Dive in and try and overlook the niggles and you will have a great time.

I received a copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. All opinions are my own, and I was not compensated for this review.

Posted@Rainy Day Ramblings.

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### **Ellen Gail says**

*"A future of marauding space scavengers and deadly aliens who kill with sound."*

I didn't know I could want something so much. ~~Fall 2016?~~ Or I guess February 2018 now? I will wait for you book. We will be together.

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### **Faye, la Patata says**

I want this pretty badly. I'm a fan of the author's previous mystery/horror works, and I can't wait to get scared by her stories again!

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### **Justine says**

3.5 stars

Overall I enjoyed this. The best thing for me was definitely the awesome Latina main character, Laura Cruz, who just brings it in so many ways. I also quite liked the male character, Tuck, particularly the way he obviously appreciated Laura's strength and never felt threatened by it.

Where I felt the story was lacking and what I wanted more of was some greater worldbuilding, particularly at the outset. The story literally starts right away at a rapid pace and never lets up. While I certainly appreciate the high level of tension and adrenaline rush the author is going for, there are also quite a lot of complexities to this imagined future that are only hinted at that I would have really liked to know more about. The

worldbuilding is dropped in bits and pieces throughout the story, but since everything is so fast paced, I didn't feel like there was a chance for enough bits to add up to as satisfying a whole as I would have liked.

But that's a matter of personal taste, and for me, it was balanced out by other things which made for an entertaining read.

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### **?Lynn? says**

This was one of my top anticipated books of 2018 and I'm sad to say it didn't really impress me. My two biggest issues was that the first half was boring as hell and it was too technical for my liking. Plus there wasn't enough creature scenes. For a scifi horror it was too much scifi. That's just me though.

I smell a sequel in the future and I might just have to pass up on it.

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### **Alicia (A Kernel of Nonsense) says**

Courtney Alameda's Pitch Dark takes the intricacies of science-fiction and combines it with all the thrills of a horror story in a novel that grabs readers from page one and doesn't let go. Alameda's two leads, Laura Cruz and Tuck Morgan, are both capable characters on their own, but they also make an excellent team and I loved the fact that they both had room to shine despite this fact. I was really impressed by the amount of detail that went into this novel from the descriptions of spaceships like the John Muir to the world-building. One of the novel's drawbacks, however, is the time-frame. The events of the novel occur very quickly making the development of a connection between characters feel a little hasty. Still, it was hard not to fall in love with Pitch Dark's characters and feel the excitement of the story. I also loved the fact that Pitch Dark is a multi-layered novel that also addresses humane nature, racism, and the politics of written history. I also want to say that if you get a chance, read Alameda's Author's Note at the end as it really resonated with me.

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### **destiny ? [howling libraries] says**

*Even the gods have abandoned us out here.*

If you follow my reviews, you know I'm a big horror fan, but what you might not already know is what a sucker I am for horror/sci-fi genre-blending and spooky stories set in outer space. Courtney Alameda is known for her horror writing, but she interlaces the terror aspects with the sci-fi, futuristic, technology side stunningly.

*We were supposed to wake up saved, or not wake up at all. That was the deal we made with fate.*

→ **Tuck** ←

The narrative of *Pitch Dark* alternates perspectives between two protagonists – one from the “past”, and one from the “future”. Our first introduction is to our “past” character, Tuck, who has been in cryo-sleep for a few hundred years, only to awaken to a spaceship full of corpses and monstrosities. He’s hopeless, angry, and hurting, but has such a good heart – a quintessential “teddy bear” character, at your service. Unfortunately, despite how lovable he can be, Tuck never felt three-dimensional to me, and his lack of intricate development was a huge drawback.

*“The madman with a box?” I ask. “Bad Wolf? We have a lot of running to do?” They both look at me as if I’m the one who’s lost my damn mind. “All righty then. Allons-y.”*

→ **pop culture references** ←

On the other hand, my favorite thing about Tuck was easily his pop culture refs. I make no attempts to hide my *usual* annoyance with these sorts of things, because they frequently come out forced and unnatural, but Tuck’s are done phenomenally and are so cute. The above-quoted Doctor Who reference was easily my favorite, but most of all, I adored how frustrated he got when people didn’t catch his references! (*I relate so much.*)

*To all the girls who write their own histories, who resist men telling them to “stop,” and save themselves in the end, this one’s for you.*

→ **Laura** ←

Our “future” perspective comes from Laura Cruz. She’s a teen Latinx girl with archaeologists for parents, and she is positively brilliant and fierce. She takes nobody’s mess and is determined to take care of herself at all costs, relying on *no one* to save her. If you enjoy hard-headed, angry, capable heroines, Laura’s your girl. I appreciated her so much, and my favorite thing about her was the social commentary she was able to provide on the current state of society.

*I’d like to say that in the last few centuries, humanity’s grown past these compulsions in a moral sense, that we’ve become better. Nobler. Wiser. But we haven’t.*

→ **racism** ←

As a woman of color, Laura explains that a few centuries haven’t been enough time to rid the entire human race of its bigotry. There’s been so much reproduction between races, it has caused a sort of ethnic mesh in most of society, to the point where fully “white” individuals only keep their white skin by going to great lengths to avoid any biracial reproductivity. Because of how deliberate being a white person in Laura’s world is, most individuals assume that entirely white individuals are simply clinging to Nazi-like ideals of the past. This was a really refreshing take on the idea of a world in which white cultural and racial diversity is normalized, but was also a truly interesting theoretical prediction for the future of our world.

*“That’s the folly of the human heart. We make macro decisions based on micro motivations.”*

→ **social commentaries** ←

Besides the discussion of racism, there's a lot of observation of how we treat the planet, as we are informed that the reason humans left Earth in Tuck's time was to escape the mess they'd made of it and the fact that the planet had been utterly drained of resources. Even the creatures on Tuck's ship are explained to have been created not by some zombie virus or magical mutation, but by the after-effects in breathing and drinking in too much pollution from the Earth era.

*They're not aliens or zombies, just our own mistake.*

→ **fear factor** ←

I know a lot of my followers are hesitant to pick up horror stories, so I wanted to go ahead and let you guys who aren't horror fans know that, in my opinion, this is an extremely approachable read for individuals who don't typically enjoy horror. It's so heavy on the sci-fi aspect that it doesn't read like your usual horror story, but there are some gruesome descriptions of mutated creatures, so if your stomach is easily unsettled, you may want to proceed with caution.

This book is inspired by the *Aliens* film franchise, and I would say that it felt very similar to those in terms of the level of horror and "grossness" achieved. If you enjoy those films, I think you would enjoy this story, too. This would be a good time to warn you that there is a scene in this book that comes with **major warnings for trypophobia**. As someone who has a mild case of trypophobia, the description in that scene was really nauseating and I had to skim past it, but it does give you a bit of warning before it goes into detail.

*I wonder what I'd do with such a lonely boy, one who carries a broken heart in his chest and pretends it beats the same as everyone else's.*

→ **romance** ←

Finally, I want to touch on the only other thing that didn't catch my eye much in *Pitch Dark*: the blossoming relationship between Tuck and Laura. You see it coming a mile away, but towards the end, I felt like it became oddly forced. They were a great pair for each other and the chemistry was there from the start, so I thought it'd be a home run, but at the end, I almost felt like, "Wait, that's all?" I don't want to give any sorts of spoilers, but I'll just say that the romance was the main reason I gave this book 4 stars instead of 5.

*All quotes are taken from an ARC and may not match the final product. Thank you so much to Feiwei & Friends for providing me with this ARC in exchange for my honest review!*

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## **Jack +Books & Bourbon+ says**

Leave it up to a movie junkie to keep wanting to call this book *Pitch Black*. And though they are both creature features set in space, they are decidedly NOT the same thing. I don't know how this one wasn't on my radar, as I really enjoyed Courtney Alameda's urban fantasy/horror mashup *Shutter*. But thankfully, my book buddy Crazy4Books came to my rescue and listed this one as a good buddy read candidate, thereby correcting my oversight. And she was correct...this did make for a good buddy read!

And if you want to read her great review, including points that I totally missed/forgot in my review, you can follow the link below.

## Crazy4Book's Review

Ostensibly a young adult novel, *Pitch Dark* reminds me quite a bit of the *Dead Space* video games. Non-military personnel up against mutated creatures in the deepest recesses of space...with much gore and violence. And let me tell you...I'm a sucker for tales like this. The *Dead Space* games gave me goosebumps due to their immersion and environment, and while I don't get nervous or scared from a book, Ms. Alameda can certainly write tense and spooky situations with definite skill. I definitely hesitated to call *Shutter* a YA book, and the same applies to *Pitch Dark*. It's oppressive, it's violent, and no details are skipped when it comes to the carnage that Tuck and crew experience.

Like all my reviews, I will keep spoilers to an absolute minimum. If it's not mentioned in the book synopsis, then I'll do my level best to not mention it here.

So, aside from bloody space monster carnage, what does *Pitch Dark* throw at us? Well, we get two protagonist POV's, a bit of philosophy about human nature and if we are only ever going to be more than a destructive species, and a little bit of teen romance. And it all works. I'm not usually a fan of romance in my books, if only because it generally feels forced or unnecessary. But here it is effective, with a natural flow that makes sense with our characters. And it's not all doe-eyed nonsense where they fall after two seconds. It actually grows and progresses like it should. As for the ruminations on human nature, it's mostly just to help set the scene for some of the character's motivations. Still, it's interesting that we as a species mostly only seem to wonder about the monstrous side of human nature when we are facing off against actual monsters.

As for our characters, we get Tuck, a crewmember on the John Muir, and Laura, a crewmember on the Conquistador. And initially, their stories couldn't be any more different from each other. But...to give away much more than that would venture into spoiler territory. The synopsis actually shies away from what's really going on, which is for the best. Makes it seem almost like a Montague and Capulet scenario, but that's really not the case.

It's hard to say which character I liked better...maybe because the first person perspective makes it a little more difficult to separate the personalities. That's not to say that they don't have distinguishing qualities, because they do. Tuck is a brooding loner, Laura is adventurous and outgoing. While Tuck has a natural disposition towards gloom and defeat, Laura is optimistic and hopeful. But regardless of their differences, the two have a natural rapport and complement each other very well. Once they got their initial meeting out of the way, I was pretty well invested in their struggles (together and individually). They definitely make an effective team.

I could definitely commiserate with Tuck and his emotional disconnection at times, as I've been that young man (a long time ago). I think Ms. Alameda has a good handle on what makes a young man tick, and was able to channel this effectively into a believable "everyman". The fact that Tuck loves, and quotes, 20th century films just endeared him to me even more. Cuz, I'm that guy, so I like it when I meet another one of my tribe.

But while she does well with Tuck, she absolutely knocked it out of the park with Laura. She's impulsive and still figuring out the labyrinth of adult relationships, but despite her youth, she is the most capable person in the book. And though she's had some terrible things happen to her, she's never a victim. She owns her mistakes, and then immediately looks for a way to make things better. And not just better for her, but for everyone. I've said it in other reviews, and I'll echo it here: I'm loving that more and more authors are bringing strong independent women to the fore to carry these stories. Where other books have severely mishandled female characters (cough cough *Twilight* series) many of the books I've read lately have

eschewed that pitfall and given us truly independent and self-assured women.

But while both main characters are cheer worthy, the supporting characters are a mixed bag. While we do get to see some of the other relationships Laura has cultivated, we get almost nothing for Tuck, who remains pretty much a cypher for the whole tale. Given the events that transpire on the John Muir ship, I actually expected there to be more comradeship and personality with the crew...but that never really manifested. When we do get supporting characters, they are generally well written, if just not present enough. And maybe that's just another hardship with a first person tale, as so much happens internally that everything external suffers a bit.

On the antagonist side of the house, we have two varieties. There's the human antagonists, who range from meh to pretty effective villains...and we have the monsters. And boy are they dangerous. And pretty interesting too. After reading a lot of sci-fi (and a fair bit of horror), it's hard to find something new or exciting. And while some of the concepts at play with the monsters aren't brand new, they are written in such a way here that they feel fresh. The monsters are deadly, and our heroes are not immune.

If there's one place that Courtney Alameda really excels, outside of good ideas and a well-paced read, it's with setting a scene. She has tension down to a science, and I loved that our heroes were never really out of harm's way. And they aren't miraculously injury-proof as well. They get hurt. A lot. I like my human characters to be, well, human, and both of our protagonists are written in realistic ways. And the dangerous situations they find themselves in give them pause. These aren't mercenaries or soldiers, they are young people who are in a crazy situation, but know they have to help make it less crazy. A spaceship can be a highly effective setting for a horror tale (*Alien* anyone?), and Ms. Alameda squeezes every ounce of dread and terror from the setting. I hope she writes more scary Sci-Fi stories down the road, as she's definitely got a knack for it.

So those are the pro's...but what about the cons?

One of my main hardships with *Pitch Dark* was the excessive witty banter. It's not that I have a problem with witty banter necessarily, as I certainly don't. But there are times when witty banter is appropriate, natural, and expected. And when used at those times, it's great. But no, the problem here is that there's several moments in the book where it's completely out of place. There's one part of the book near the end when two people who barely know each other are slinging one-liners and off-the-cuff puns at each other while in the middle of several life-or-death struggles. One off-hand comment I could see happening, but to carry on a whole pun-ishing (see what I did there?) conversation while literally fighting for your life just felt false. Especially when one of those characters has spent years living virtually silently. But somehow, in the middle of a situation that requires utmost concentration, these two characters are actively trying to come up with funny puns, even while being scared to death. It just didn't work, and served only to diminish the drama and effectively pull me from that part of the tale.

The book is also written in a rather casual way, full of figurative language, with plenty of similes and metaphors to enrich the storytelling. And it generally works, except that it's slightly overdone. I think that's one of the main drawbacks to first-person storytelling...it seems very easy to fall back on similes to help convey detail. Again, for the most part it works, but one gets the impression that both of the leads only ever think in figurative language. Which, hell, maybe they do, and I'm just the weird one.

I'd say my only real other point of contention is the motivations of one of the factions within Laura's crew. Their ship has been doing deep-space recovery for years, but there's a small contingent of the crew looking to sabotage the whole operation. And they've had years where Laura's ship has been running to and fro



where they could have caused all sorts of problems or even completely destroyed the ship. But...they just waited until their ship met up with Tuck's ship? His ship isn't the first one that Laura's crew has come across, but this time the sabotage crew really means it? It's obvious from their actions that self-preservation isn't an issue...so why the casual reluctance to actually sabotage the mission so many years in? It just seemed...odd. But, I suppose, if the sabotage crew HAD done their job effectively, there wouldn't have been a book. So...points to Gryffindor?

Pop culture aficionados take heed...*Pitch Dark* has quite a bit of banter (as well as a few one-offs cleverly hidden) that references our modern movie and music landscape. And while it never achieves *Ready Player One* levels of pop-culture references, this book comes awfully close. Seems like Ms. Alameda and I watch and recall all the same movies, as none of the references flew over my head. It's nice to be on the inside of the inside jokes for a change.

So I liked *Pitch Dark* quite a bit. I even liked it better than *Shutter*, which I definitely enjoyed. And it would have been easy for Courtney Alameda to stick with another urban horror book, so kudos to her for branching out and going a different direction entirely.

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### **Stacee says**

I enjoyed Courtney's other book and I was all over that synopsis, so I was pretty excited to get to it.

I liked Laura and Tuck well enough. They're both sassy and sarcastic and smart. They had some great banter and I wish they would have been together more in the story. There were some other interesting characters, but I didn't feel like we got to know much of them.

Plot wise, I was lost for a good portion of the book. All of the ships and space and mechanics confused me and at times it felt like I was missing something I should have known. However, I loved all of the alien action. They were creepy and that entire aspect of the story was fantastic.

Overall, it was an interesting idea and a quick read with a satisfying ending. There were a lot of things I liked, yet I wasn't ever captivated. If there's a sequel, I'll definitely be reading.

**\*\*Huge thanks to Feiwei and Friends for providing the arc free of charge\*\***

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### **Cindy ☆? Savage Queen ? says**

Wait...I thought this was coming out this month...what do you mean this isn't coming out until February 2018? NO!!!!!!

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Alright, I was reluctant before, but now with the full synopsis coupled with this absolutely eerie, yet lovely cover, I am on board!

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