

Hive: Madders of Time: Book One

DL Orton

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Time travel is used to address the climate crisis, growing class inequality, and the looming threat of social collapse in the startling science fiction series opener Hive.

In DL Orton's cautionary science fiction novel *Hive*, the last human survivors use time travel to help their younger selves avert the apocalypse.

In the near future, elderly Isabel and Diego are the last two living humans after a social and ecological doomsday. Believing they may be able to save humanity by nudging their younger selves, they send Diego back in time to deliver a cryptic message. Middle-aged versions of Diego and Isabel, prompted by this warning, work to prevent Isabel's honeybee drones from bringing an end to humanity. Elsewhere, Matthew, a scientist, is forced to work with the military to create the devices that will, in the future, be used to send Diego back in time.

While the plot relies on fantastical elements like wormholes and time travel, its conflicts are more grounded. They center the ever-worsening climate crisis, growing class inequality, and the looming threat of social collapse. Isabel's ex-husband Dave is a greedy, womanizing CEO who provokes such anxieties. Driving fancy cars and dating too-young women, Dave exists in inflammatory opposition to Isabel and Diego's efforts to prevent the apocalypse.

Themes of regret color the book's characterizations. Younger Diego and Isabel made mistakes that torment them. When they acknowledge their regrets, their stifled feelings blossom. Their revived romance complements the doomsday narrative, introducing a sliver of hope into an otherwise dire situation. The couple's life together in Diego's cabin is heartwarming. However, the end of the book introduces sizable time jumps, and the couple's domestic milestones are too rushed through.

The book's poetic descriptions of nature provide a peaceful view of the environment outside humanity's reaches, as with the windy mountains near Diego's isolated cabin. Likewise, areas marked by human development, like Dave's high-tech biodomes, are developed in terms of the panicked, violent throngs within them. The breadth of the imagery between such extremes is dynamic. Further, concepts of time travel and branching parallel universes are explained in accessible language. Some, as with jinn objects, are underexplained when they first appear, though.

People's conversations are funny and down-to-earth. When Matthew interacts with government officials, he refers to them by nicknames like Dick, Junior, and Picasso, speaking to their memorable traits. Dick, who is rude and ill-adapted to changes in protocol, is a caricature of a standoffish bureaucrat and provides comic relief for the story's building tension. Related humor is strained in places, though, as it often relies on Dick's mishearing or misunderstanding scientific terms.

The coming apocalypse is a lengthy, multistep process, and as it grows closer and more inevitable, the book's thrills rise. However, the story comes to an abrupt ending: While the world around Isabel, Diego, and Matthew undergoes dramatic changes, in this volume, it remains uncertain how much of their efforts were futile.

Hive is a surprising science fiction novel that centers middle age and second chances.

VIOLET GLENN (February 1, 2025)

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