

FROM THE AUTHOR OF THE #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER *THE FINISHER*

DAVID BALDACCI



THE WIDTH OF THE
WORLD

The enemy is everywhere.



Also in the Vega Jane series

The Finisher (Vega Jane Book One)

The Keeper (Vega Jane Book Two)

THE
WIDTH
OF THE
WORLD



VEGA JANE BOOK THREE
A NOVEL BY

DAVID BALDACCI



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*To Sandy Violette and Caspian Dennis,
For being so awesome from day one*

"There is some good in this world, and
it's worth fighting for."

— J. R. R. Tolkien

"In a time of universal deceit, telling the
truth is a revolutionary act."

— George Orwell



A Place Called True

WE LANDED, INVISIBLE, on the cobbles and were nearly killed.

Petra Sonnet cried out, Delph Delphia grunted in surprise, my canine, Harry Two, yipped and I, Vega Jane, jerked back on the magical tether holding us all together, as the deafening contraption charging down on us flashed past.

It was boxy and made of metal and wood with windowed doors on either side. It also had four what looked to be wagon wheels, only there were no sleps pulling it.

The infernal thing was moving of its own accord! It was puffing and wheezing, with what sounded like metal clanking on metal. Bright lights like powerful candles housed in lanterns were perched on the front of the thing, providing illumination. The front piece was shiny metal with ridges. Etched on it was a name: RILEY.

Riley? Was that the bloke who owned it? Or maybe the bloke who built it? We'd had a wagonmaker back in Wormwood named O'Dougall who put his name on the side of each one.

In a few moments the Riley, swaying from side to side and with a belch of smoke coming out its hindquarters, turned the corner and vanished from our view.

A pale Delph looked at me. "What the ruddy Hel was that?"

I shook my head because I had no idea what the ruddy Hel it was. Rattled, I scratched Harry Two's remaining ear.

We all had scars from our journey across the Quag.

Delph's arm had been burned and blackened.

Harry Two had lost an ear.

Petra had injured her hand.

And I had the mark of the three hooks upon the back of my hand. It had been burned into my skin by some unknown means.

I drew a breath and was about to return us to visibility by spinning my ring around when the pair of males appeared.

We froze, each holding our breath, lest they hear even that slight sound.

"You sure it was from here?" the taller of them asked the other.

The male nodded.

My mind was whirling. These were the blokes we had seen earlier, after escaping the Quag. How could they have followed us?

I glanced at Delph and Petra. They looked as terrified as I felt.

I pointed to the right and we shuffled off around the corner.

We set our tucks down and I breathlessly whispered, "They followed us. How?"

Petra shook her head. But Delph said, "You reckon they can detect magic? Because you done that to get us here." He pointed to the magical tethers that kept us all invisible.

I looked down at my wand like it had just bitten me. *Could that be true?*

Delph said, "Look." He was pointing to the right. Down the cobbles at the very end of the street was a tall building made of stone and brick and timbers. I stared up at the highest point of the edifice.

"Steeple," I said in wonder.

"It's got a bell too," said Delph. "Me dad said Steeples had a bell once, before it broke."

"Steeple?" said Petra, looking confused.

"The place back in Wormwood where Wugmorts would go to listen to Ezekiel the Sermonizer deliver his very long soliloquies," I explained. "Telling us to be good while scaring us half to death with tales of how badly our lives would turn out regardless of what we did."

But Delph had a point. At night Steeples had always been empty. I wagered this building might be the same.

We shouldered our tucks and crept along the cobbles until we came to the double wooden doors that constituted the entrance to the place.

There was a sign next to it.

"Saint Necro's," I read. I glanced at Delph. "What do you reckon that means?"

"Dunno, do I?" he replied. "Never heard-a no Saint Necro. Alls I know is Steeples."

I tried the doors but they were locked. I pointed my wand at the heavy wrought-iron lock and was about to whisper "*Ingressio*" when Delph grabbed my arm.

"Magic," he said warningly.

I nodded and slowly lowered my wand.

Delph tried to open the door but it was clearly bolted shut.

Then Petra noticed a window on the side. "It's not locked."

Delph boosted her up first and she slid through. I followed. Delph lifted Harry Two through the opening and into my arms, and then he brought up the rear.

We looked around at a vast chamber that was far larger than Steeples, though it was configured quite similarly, with brightly colored windows, rows of seats and a raised area up front where sermons were no doubt given. I wondered whether the sermonizer who spoke here was as depressing as Ezekiel. Petra said in a hushed tone, "Where do we go now?"

I pointed to a set of stone stairs that led upward. "Let's see what's up that way."

"Why not down?" said Petra, pointing to another set of stairs that apparently led to a lower floor of this saint's place.

"No," I said. "Up is better."

She gave me a skeptical look, but I didn't wait for her approval of my plans. They expected me to lead; well, that's what I was going to do! I hustled over to the stairs with Harry Two gliding along next to me. Delph and Petra hurried after us.

That's when we heard the footsteps at the entry.

We ducked down between two sets of pews as I heard someone say, "*Ingressio*."

The doors flew open.

We heard footsteps approach. I lifted my head a bit so I could see over the backs of the pews. It was the same two cloaked figures.

But this was impossible. I hadn't used magic before they got here. How could they be —

I looked down at the mark on my hand and gaped. Was it that?

As the footsteps drew closer, I heard one of the males say, "Are you sure?"

I peered over the edge again in time to see the other bloke hold up his wand. "See for yourself," he said.

The wand was glowing.

The other one nodded. "Right."

He crept along until he got to where we were hidden.

"There!" he snapped. He pointed his wand and said, "*Infernus!*"

"*Embattlemento!*" I instantly cried out.

His blast of fire ricocheted off my shield spell and he had to duck to avoid being incinerated.

The second bloke rushed forward, casting spell after spell our way, each more powerful than the last.

Petra cast a shield spell as well, and his magic rebounded off it and smashed into the pews, destroying them.

Spells were now being cast so fast I could barely follow them. The inside of the building was being pummeled.

Glass shattered. Wooden pews disintegrated, and a small statue of a female exploded when hit by a glancing blow from a rebounding spell. I had never been in such a battle as this one. The sheer ferocity and speed nearly paralyzed me. And though we were still invisible we were in terrible danger of being killed simply by being in this confined space.

I was hurling spells so fast I could barely remember thinking of the incantation before sending it off. When I glanced at Petra, I saw both terror and fury in her eyes. Somehow, this filled me with resolve.

I slid on my belly, squeezed under a pew, came up behind the bloke and said, "*Impacto.*" He was blasted off his feet and flung against a wall.

But the bloke rebounded off it, turned and fired multiple spells in my general direction. I ducked, then threw myself over a pew. I turned in time to see Delph get slammed against another pew by the force of one of the spells.

I heard someone cry out and looked to see Petra fly over another pew and crash into the floor.

I whirled around on the same bloke and fired every spell I could think of. The problem was he was deflecting them left and right. My arm was growing weary, and Petra had not recovered enough to help me. When a spell hit so close to my head that it made me wonky, I ducked under a pew for a moment to catch my breath and clear my senses.

When I looked back up I almost cheered as I saw Delph slam into the male, lift him up, turn him upside down and pile drive him into the floor. I had seen Delph use that same move in the Duelum back in Wormwood. The bloke went limp.

The next instant a light shot right past my face, hit the wall behind me and knocked a hole in it. The concussive force of the spell knocked me heels over arse and broke the magical tether keeping the others invisible.

"Got you!" roared the other bloke who had shot at me as he pointed his wand right at Delph's exposed chest.

Before I could regain my feet and aim my wand, a voice called out, "*Subservio.*"

Petra's spell hit the bloke square on, and he instantly went rigid and his wand hand dropped. He then simply stood there looking blankly ahead.

We rose on shaky legs and approached him.

"Thanks, Pet, you saved me," said Delph weakly.

"Yes, you did, Petra," I said. "That was quick thinking."

She let out a long breath. "I'm . . . I'm just glad it worked. I couldn't let him hurt you, Delph."

They locked gazes for a moment, and I felt my face begin to burn. I was glad that she had saved Delph, but did she have to give him *that* look? And did he have to give it right back?

"Look at this, Vega Jane."

While I had been thinking all this Delph had gone over to check on the other fellow. Petra and I rushed over with Harry Two next to us.

Delph pointed at the wand still held in the bloke's hand.

I stared down at it, stunned.

Etched on his brightly glowing wand was the mark of the three hooks! The same mark that had been burned onto my hand. The mark on the wand was pulsing as though alive.

Delph said, "*That's* how they managed it. Your mark, it must give off a signal."

I nodded, for he was assuredly right about that. But then what was I to do? I couldn't very well cut off my hand.

"Vega Jane, your glove!" said Delph.

"My what?" I said distractedly.

"Your glove. It has powerful magic. See if it can block the signal."

I plunged my hand into my cloak pocket and pulled out the glove Alice Adronis had given me in order to handle the Elemental, which was now also my wand. I had once thought I needed the glove to hold the Elemental, but Astrea Prine back in the Quag had shown me that this was not the case.

I hastily pulled on the glove, covering the mark. I hoped whatever magic the glove had was enough.

I looked at the fellow's wand and breathed a sigh of relief. The mark of the three hooks was gone from it and the wand was no longer glowing.

"That was brilliant!" said Petra to Delph.

She gave him a hug and a peck on the cheek. I saw him smile. Yet when he glanced at me and saw my expression was one of granite, he coughed, turned red and said, "'Twas nothing really."

"It was actually very smart of you, Delph." I turned to Petra. "But if we give out hugs and kisses every time someone does something smart, I reckon we might not have slivers for anything else."

Petra gave me a haughty look and rubbed Delph's arm.

Gritting my teeth, I turned, pointed my wand at the unconscious bloke, performed the *Subservio* spell and removed any memory he might have had of this. I did the same with his mate. Next, Petra and I repaired the damage to the building.

Finally, I turned the ring back around, attached the magical tethers, and we became invisible once more. It was only then that I released the blokes who had attacked us from the spell.

They both looked around.

One said, "What the blazes are we doing here?"

His mate looked down at his wand. "I don't know. Was it something to do with my wand?"

The other fellow shook his head. "Last thing I remember

I was in me bed. And that's where I'm going back to," he added angrily.

He turned and left. His mate gave the place one more searching look and joined him, shutting the doors behind him.

I let out a long breath. "Now let's go find a place to hide."

The long winding staircase carried us upward. It would, I was sure, lead all the way to the bell tower. But I stopped short of that. There was a door to the right. I tried it. Locked. I pulled out my wand, and a moment later the door opened.

I had grown accustomed to being able to do things like this, but I never wanted to take it for granted. I had come to completely adore being a sorceress!

Inside the room were old trunks. There was also a window. Which I had hoped there would be.

I closed the door behind us and locked it. I pointed to the window. "And when the light comes, we can watch the goings-on down there. Get the lay of the land."

"Right good plan," opined Delph, though Petra merely shrugged.

"We should get some sleep," I said. "But like back in the Quag, we'll take turns keeping watch, just in case."

I offered to take the first watch, and the others settled down on the floor, with their tucks as their pillows. We had retrieved some blankets that were stacked neatly in a corner, for the floor was hard and the room was cool.

I took up watch by the window for a bit with Harry Two lying next to me. I didn't see any movement down below. I was hoping that I would see another of those metal-and-wood things with wheels, but I didn't. In the distance I thought I

heard a long, high whistle of sorts, but I couldn't be too sure of that, for the sound carried strangely up here.

I finally turned to some of the trunks and, trying to remain as quiet as possible so I wouldn't wake the others, I started searching them, hoping they would give us some idea as to the place we were now in.

The first trunk was filled with clothes. Trousers, coats, shirts, shoes and frocks. Even some hats. They were of a style, cut and material I had never seen. I looked down at my own clothes under my long cloak. Then I had an idea. I pulled out a number of the clothes and matched them up as best I could. If we were going to fit into this place, whatever it was, we had to dress like the others who were here.

I put these aside and opened the next trunk. When I saw what was in there I felt like I had happened upon a treasure trove.

Books! I pulled a goodly number of them out, sat on my haunches and, using the conjured light from my wand, began to look through them.

The first few books were filled with what looked to me to be sermons that someone like Ezekiel would deliver in ponderous tones meant to intimidate rather than uplift. However, the next book was far more interesting and potentially useful.

It was entitled *A Book of True*.

True, I quickly came to learn, was the name of the place we were in. Astonishingly, there were words in the book that I had never seen before: *years, horse, man, woman, church* and *motor* being among them. Fortunately, at least for most of the words, there were accompanying pictures. Thus I learned

that man and woman were like our male and female and both were referred to as people, not Wugmorts.

My education continued. A horse was our *slep*. A canine was a dog. Sessions translated to years, which were divided up into twelve *months* and the twelve months were divided up into something called *days*. And slivers were minutes. And sixty of those minutes represented something called an hour. The church was the place we were currently in. And a motor was the contraption we had seen rumbling along. Oh, and there was something called the morning, which apparently was when the sun was coming up, and the rest of the light was called the day. And the Noc was called the moon.

I leaned back against the coolness of the stone and repeated these terms over and over, hitching them to the pictures in the book. I didn't know that learning a new language would be required here, but why not? Everything about this journey had been totally unpredictable. Just because we had escaped the Quag, that simple rule needn't change.

And if we wanted to fit in here, we couldn't very well go around this place calling horses *sleps* and the moon the Noc.

As I continued to read, I learned that True had experienced several centuries — a word I had learned previously — of peace following some difficult periods of war and uncertainty. There were pictures of Wugs — or I guess “people,” since they never lived in Wormwood — engaged in fun activities with their youngs, who were called children. I looked at the illustrations of the smiling children and wondered how that fit with what I had been told about the ruthlessness and savagery of the Maladons, the magical race

that Astrea Prine had told us had beaten her kind in a great war. Presumably the Maladons now ruled this place.

But hang on! Had perhaps these people fought and overthrown the Maladons? That would explain the reference to past wars followed by peace. But how had the people done this? Were they magical? How else could they have beaten the powerful sorcery the Maladons supposedly possessed? After all, they had thrashed my kind, who were powerfully magical in their own right.

And most telling of all, I believed we had run into a pair of Maladons twice already. So they *were* here. It was truly puzzling.

I continued to read and learn as much as I could.

I gazed at the picture of the motor and marveled how it could move without sleps, or horses rather, pulling it. Had this been created by magic?

Before I knew it, the sun was coming up outside. I had forgotten to awaken Delph or Petra to take over my watch. But I was not tired in the least. My head filled with all this new information; my mind was swirling with questions and possibilities. But mostly questions, I had to admit.

I moved back over to the window and looked out. With the sun up, I could see things quite clearly now. True was larger than it had appeared last night. I could now see spires of many buildings in the distance. Wugmorts — I caught myself — *people* were emerging from buildings. I waved my wand and muttered, "*Crystilado magnifica.*" Instantly, I was seeing all of this as though it were inches from my face.

I noticed, gratefully, that the people looked like us at least; otherwise it would be awfully hard for us to fit in. And

their clothes looked like the ones I had pilfered from the trunk. Again, a good thing. But, then again, we might stand out anyway. We were three strangers with a canine. How would we explain our presence here? A clattering sound caught my attention, and in my magnified line of sight came another motor speeding down the cobbles. It was followed by a second motor. The second motor looked different — it was bigger than the other and had more people riding in it. They rode in one lower and one upper level that constituted the thing. At one corner the bigger motor stopped and some people got off and others got on. On the side was a sign that read TRUE TRANSPORT. This must be how they moved from one place to another, I thought.

"Blimey!"

I whirled around to find Delph and Petra staring over my shoulder.

"You didn't wake us to take a watch," said Petra disapprovingly.

"I thought I'd just let you sleep," I replied a bit lamely.

Delph said, "Vega Jane, you can't do this alone. I know I can't do magic, but I didn't fight my way across the Quag to be useless!"

His words cut into me with the force of a hurled blade. Delph never talked to me that way. I glanced at Petra. I could tell she was pleased by Delph's comments, which made my blood boil.

I composed myself and said, "You're right, Delph. But I've learned quite a lot actually."

I took some time showing them the clothes and the books and telling them of the new terms I had learned, like *people* and

dogs and *morning* and *horses* and *motors*. They took this all in, though I could tell they were even more overwhelmed by it than I had been.

Then I heard Delph's belly rumbling.

It was then that I realized I was starving. I looked in my tuck to find that my larder was basically empty. Delph and Petra did the same, with similar results.

Even Harry Two's expression was one of abject hunger.

I decided on a course of action and parceled out the clothes I had found in one of the trunks. We swiftly dressed and put our old clothes and boots along with the spare new items in our tucks. I slipped the book on True into my coat pocket.

Petra said, "But what now? We can't go outside, can we?"

I replied, "I've seen lots and lots of Wu —" I stopped. "I mean I've seen lots of *people* coming and going. And almost never did I see one of them hail another. I think this place is far larger than we initially thought. We only saw it coming in during the darkness. If there are lots of blokes around, then maybe, in our new clothes, we can blend in with them."

"But what about Harry Two?" asked Delph.

"You saw the pictures of canines — I mean dogs — in the book. And I've seen four people walking ca —" I stopped again, frustrated with having to learn a new language so quickly. "DOGS!"

Delph said, probably equally frustrated, "Can we speak Wugish for now?"

I nodded. "Yes, but we can't when we're dealing with blokes from here. We have to start thinking in their language,

Delph. And since only those from Wormwood are Wugs, we have to call the blokes here 'people.'"

"That makes sense," he replied.

"Maybe best we say nothing a'tall, till we hear some of them blokes talk," suggested Petra.

"That's a good idea, actually," I replied, giving her a smile. I wanted to like and trust Petra, I really did. And if she turned out to be a Maladon, I hoped I could kill her before she killed me.

Delph nodded. "All right, then, but that doesn't explain how we'll get food to eat. We got nothing to pay with."

I hadn't thought about this.

"We'll face that bridge when we get to it," I said gamely.

I returned us to visibility and we headed downstairs.

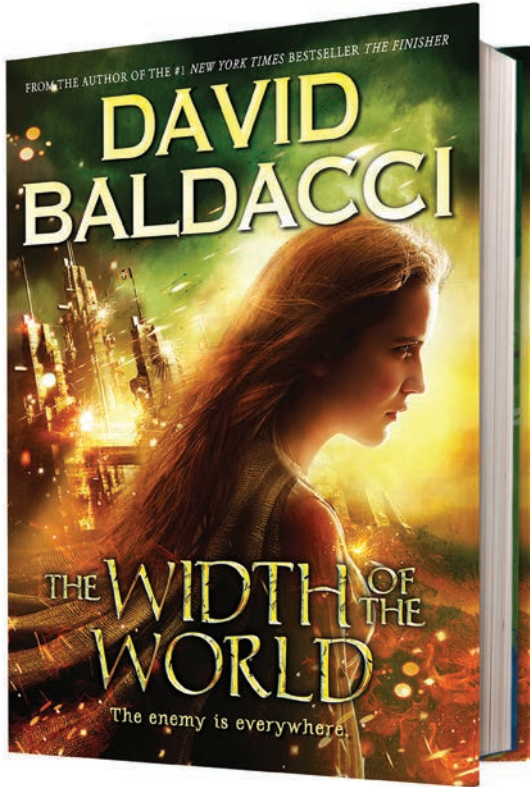
We had reached the front doors of the place, and I had just opened them with my wand when a voice cried out.

"Oi! What in blazes are you lot doing here?"

I didn't even look for the source.

As we had so often done in the Quag, we just ran for it.

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