

Gatekeeper: Book One in the Daemon Collecting Series

Alison Levy

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Gatekeeper is a spirited fantasy novel in which a daemon catcher relies on her wits to save the world.

Broken daemons are a real problem in Alison Levy's exciting fantasy novel *Gatekeeper*, but at least there's someone to help.

Rachel is tasked with picking up malfunctioning daemons who have forgotten how to behave and bringing them back to the next world, where someone else deals with the problem. Each week she gets new assignments for daemons to find. This week, she slept late and wound up with four doozies, including a human being.

Since Rachel is a professional, and because her work helps her family and makes the world a little safer, she gets to work, but it soon becomes clear that the daemons on her list are more than they seem. Her assignment carries dark implications for the human world and her own. The human whom she's supposed to grab is the trick: he's willing to use violence to get what he wants. As Rachel makes sense of the ramblings of a mystical homeless man, Bach, and seeks to head off the return of a dead god, the novel becomes thrilling.

The world outside of Rachel's arcane realm resembles ours, with cell phones, homeless people, and attendant suffering. Here, daemons are behind such problems: one type whispers lust-filled thoughts into people's ears; another tempts passersby to break into an abandoned house. Rachel dons special glasses to catch a problematic daemon, for whom she becomes responsible; he becomes a sidekick of sorts. A quirky mix of office politics and mystical intrigue tops off the work.

Enlivened by delightful humor that extends to its dialogue, the story plays Rachel's occasional grumpiness and deadpan tone against the oddness of the world around her. She gives Bach a place to stay; he's amazed when he learns about her job, which is "not as glamorous as it sounds." Rachel's angsty voice masks her hope that the world might surprise her.

While characters beyond Rachel hold interest, the book's villain is dimensionless. His development is limited to the fact that he's bent on taking over the world. The story's more formidable villains come in the form of injustices, such as that people have to pay for health care and that cultural histories are trapped behind museum walls. Such realities drive Rachel bonkers, and her penetrating outsider's perspective results in fascinating commentary.

Tantalizing clues about a deep conspiracy within Rachel's organization help to make *Gatekeeper* a spirited fantasy novel in which a daemon catcher relies on her wits to save the world.

JEREMIAH ROOD (July 27, 2020)

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