FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ HISTORICAL

## Luz

**Luis Gonzalez**
CreateSpace (Dec 5, 2013)
Softcover $19.98 (562pp)
978-1-4774-9201-7

*Written with verve and sensitivity, Gonzalez crafts a humorous Cuban tale full of unexpected twists and rich characterizations.*

Luis Gonzalez's debut novel is a hefty, surprising, and absorbing exploration of faith, both in political and divine redemption, set in a Cuba that has wearied of its dictator.

It's the summer of 1994, and Cubans have been offered a brief window in which to escape to the sea without fear of official repercussions. Young poet Clara is primed for the opportunity, and persuades her husband, Rigo, to accompany two friends on a raft bound for Miami. She's convinced that the summer's events are miraculous—a conviction that is suddenly both confirmed and overshadowed by a divine visitation.

Heaven's sent a messenger to inform Clara that, rather than leaving, she's to mount an insurrection of a classic religious form. She's to give birth to God's child—this time around, a daughter named Luz. God insists that he's simply looking for a second chance at parenthood, no strings attached for the little one this time. Other members of the trinity remain unconvinced. As for Clara, she's for once decided to leave her fate up to divine providence, even if it means relinquishing Rigo to America forever.

The first hundred pages of Gonzalez's novel lack mention of this divine calling, and are instead devoted to painting a picture of life in Castro's Cuba. Said picture is not a flattering one for the dictator, against whom Clara's intellectual family finds both small and catastrophic ways to rebel. The members of her family are lovingly drawn, from blindness-afflicted Pilar to Clara's linguistic genius father, whose experiences abroad disillusion the family of the notion that there's true escape even in academic pursuits.

Though Gonzalez's diction is sometimes heavy-handed in these sections—the metaphor of emotional speedboats ramming into the less fortified emotional vessels of others is a repeated one—he also recreates Cuba with verve and sensitivity. The indignities visited upon innocent citizens are juxtaposed with the gilded experiences of foreign visitors with affecting success.

Sections devoted to God's conversations with his son in Heaven provide both levity and space for theological considerations. Jesus, who's going through what God calls his "terrible two thousands," berates his father for expending so much energy on an obstinate planet and belittles God's previous parenting skills in a preemptive attempt to make life on Earth more pleasant for Luz.

God trades between recollections of biblical times and assurances that he has no grand plan for his newest child. They volley their contentions and memories about, not always staying perfectly in character, but well reflecting the antagonism that exists between some fathers and sons.

Later chapters prepare the way for a sequel, and readers who enjoy the strangeness of this humorous and theological first installment will certainly look forward to Luz's future adventures. With its unexpected twists and rich characterizations, *Luz* is a first novel whose surprises reward the suspension of disbelief.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (February 3, 2014)

*Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Review make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.*