



New City Chronicles: Book I: Book I Catching a Spider

E. L. Hendrix

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In Catching a Spider, the first book of a futuristic trilogy, a battle between powerful evil and humble-but-skilled good begins.

The first book in E. L. Hendrix's science fiction trilogy *New City Chronicles*, *Catching a Spider*, is a complex, thrilling adventure set in post-World War III America.

After the Final War in the late twenty-first century, New City was founded. It's less of a city than it is an empire that spans the earth; the lands beyond New City are dead zones where few people live. New City is controlled by an immortal supernatural being, Devan Elaniel, who rules it with an iron fist. Centuries before, Elaniel heard a prophecy that a descendant of a powerful girl with mystical powers would make him a god—but only if that descendant, a young virgin, marries him and bears him a child. Elaniel tracks the girl's descendants for centuries.

Elaniel is obsessed with a stunning, twenty-year-old, Tabitha. He believes she is the prophesied virgin, but she despises him. Possessing vast intelligence, Tabitha is in the process of creating an artificial intelligence to identify and kill people with altered genetics—including Mark and Ari, a married couple who are expecting their first child. Ari's great-grandfather convinces Mark to steal valuable data from Elaniel and Tabitha, hoping to extinguish the technology and alter the course of the prophecy. His concern is that Elaniel will destroy the world.

The narration alternates between Mark's perspective and those of Tabitha and others. Mark tells about half of the story. He begins as an average man whose discovery of his and Ari's genetic roots drives him to participate in the war against Elaniel. Next to him, Ari's role is important, and her personality is sweet, though her presence in the novel is minimal. Elaniel and Tabitha dominate when Mark's perspective isn't centered.

Despite the fact that only Mark's narration is intimate, all of the characters' thoughts and feelings are covered, and the perspective switches seem to be present most for some narrative variety. Still, characters' motivations and personality traits shine through: Tabitha's history of sexual abuse, and her understanding of her role in Elaniel's prophecy, inform her ambition, stubbornness, and vanity. But Tabitha's high libido serves little purpose to the story, and it reinforces the prominence of the male gaze in the book, in which sexual dominance and assault are off-putting presences, as is men's preference for girls on the brink of womanhood.

While the story's focus is on preventing Elaniel from accessing Tabitha's technology, the world beyond this plot is vast, and its lore is deep. Even with sparse, vague descriptions of New City and the dead zones, it is evident that there is much more in both to explore. This first book in the series sets the foundation of the series' world building—and the expectation that the sequels will better plumb the depths of New City's mythology.

The book ends with revealed secrets that contextualize New City's advanced technological developments; the revelations have explosive potential. In *Catching a Spider*, the first book of a futuristic trilogy, a battle between powerful evil and humble-but-skilled good begins.

AIMEE JODOIN (July 10, 2021)

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