



The Crystal Skull: A Sentinel 10 Novel

Daniela Valenti

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In the romantic fantasy novel The Crystal Skull, flawed people determine what they are willing to do for love and control.

In Daniela Valenti's fantasy novel *The Crystal Skull*, the second book in the Sentinel 10 series, betrayals inside of a powerful and ancient secret society lead to death and destruction that only one woman can stop.

Amanda is an outwardly self-assured medical student who wants to save lives. She has a fiancé, James, as well as a best friend to support her. Inwardly, she's vulnerable and introspective. She's also the most powerful sentinel in a secret order of living weapons, with abilities beyond her scope of understanding. She learns to embrace her power even when it causes rifts in her relationship. As a further complication, Amanda's first love, Alain, whom she thought had died, reappears in her life; drama ensues.

When lower-level sentinels start dying in mysterious ways, the ancient organization knows that only one of their own could deliver such damage: a deranged committee member who is draining the energy and life from sentinels to increase his own power. Amanda is forced to put her life on hold to save the world; if she doesn't, she and her friends will die unjust deaths.

But as the danger increases, James's ingrained sense of gender roles affects his attitude and behavior toward Amanda; he asserts his need to be her protector, and expects her to become a housewife. Her supernatural, clandestine missions, which put their lives at risk, are not a part of his plan.

Suspense is generated around what the committee is willing to do to their own sentinels in order to preserve their authority, and is deepened as Alain gains his memory. Flashbacks to Alain and Amanda's past relationship surface, indicating a reckless, unsympathetic love that is nonetheless undeniable in its strength. Morals and loyalties shift as both Amanda's love life and trust in her mentors are thrown into chaos, resulting in uncertainty and interesting conflicts as she weighs difficult decisions.

This sequel weaves reminders of past events into its narrative in a natural and informative way. The main villain is hyped well, and steady reveals juxtapose the extent of his power with the abilities of the sentinels. Exciting and illustrative fight scenes follow, though the final battle is quick in comparison to the buildup to it, and the ultimate sources of the sentinels' powers remains unknown. Historic artifacts, including crystal skulls and jewelry from ancient civilizations, are introduced to provide ability boosts and link esoteric concepts together, but their easy attainability and quick use diminishes the strength of their narrative contributions. Still, the book's ending is entertaining, featuring surprises and hints at future excitement in the series.

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DELIA STANLEY (December 25, 2021)

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