



★ **The Record Keeper**

Agnes Gomillion

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In Agnes Gomillion's gripping science fiction debut, *The Record Keeper*, Arika is born in a postwar, resource-ravaged world and is plucked from her community's nursery for a position of power.

Arika may have a warm bed, clean clothes, and the promise of a better life, but she also lives at the mercy of the English, the white ruling class who claimed the dominant place in America after the last world war. Future record keepers are taught that the Kongo work the fields out of necessity and that the English have their own complementary roles to fill. Even Obi Solomon, the Kongo hero of the war, said that it was so.

While Arika can recite related history lessons at length, she's also the girl who once sang young Kongos toward a unity that smacked of rebellion. Fear squelched her songs early on, and it's especially acute before Teacher Jones, who is notorious for her viciousness.

Now, as her class valedictorian, Arika is close to escaping Jones's reach. But then a new student, Hosea, appears, and Jones enlists Arika's help in determining why he was sent—and what he knows about a brewing rebellion. What Arika learns upends all of her certainties and allegiances, leading her somewhere truer and more perilous than she ever imagined.

Old-world elements, including a terrible plague and structural racism that enslaves some and makes monsters of others, wend into the text. Sans references to future history and science fiction additions—like the Rebirth, a pill that reprograms workers' memories, and the Helix, an individualized weapon—the setting could easily be mistaken for antebellum, which makes the text's developments all the more searing.

As Arika grows to assume her most powerful place among the people, *The Record Keeper*—with its absorbing developments and clarion call to freedom—will hold its readership in thrall and have them waiting expectantly for the follow-up.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May/June 2019)

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