

Clarion Review ★★★★☆

SCIENCE FICTION

Writer: Daughter of Time, Book 2

Erec Stebbins

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Biomedical researcher Erec Stebbins returns with the second book in his *Daughter of Time* trilogy, an exciting continuation of the foundation-rocking story of maybe-goddess Ambra Dawn. Set two centuries after her supposedly posthumous rescue of Earth, this installment presents an even more complex and engrossing showdown between the universal forces of good and evil. *Writer* is guaranteed to keep readers on their toes and generate intense interest in the conclusion.

The first book in the series, *Reader*, focused on Ambra Dawn as she evolved from being the pawn of the Dram, the baddest villains among all the planets, into a powerful force in her own right. *Writer* gives the starring role to Nitin, a young Indian captain in Earth's defense forces who has loved Ambra Dawn since his birth. He has just received the most promising assignment of his life: to become part of the support team at the Temple, which is the residence of Ambra Dawn and other Readers of impressive caliber.

But Nitin scarcely has time to relish his role because the Dram are back and thirsty for revenge. Accompanied by a mysterious and formidable force, soon understood as antimatter, they've set out not only to reconquer lost worlds but also to undo the very fabric of existence. All that stands in their way are Nitin's team of five earthlings, Ambra Dawn, and her advisor, Waythrel.

Writer possesses all of the style, elegance, and tension that made *Reader* gripping. In many ways, Stebbins simply takes the tale further: Ambra Dawn drifts closer to becoming a deity here, continually manipulating space and time to rescue whole planets from indefatigable surface enemies. Indeed, she is so powerful, those around her come to seem nearly superfluous. If any frustrations arise for readers, they're centered around the comparable incompetence of her backup team. Though who could reasonably be called upon to usefully assist a goddess?

Suspension of disbelief is required in order to embrace Stebbins's worlds, but this is an easy concession to make. The universes he devises are both thrilling and daunting. Stebbins is a master stage-setter, and each development is intricately conceived. Writers, as functionaries, are not as neatly explained as the Readers were, but there's so much else to work with that this seems an excusable omission.

The love story between Nitin and Ambra Dawn provides surprises that justify its sometimes interruptive sweetness throughout, and the romance serves to further highlight the scope of Ambra Dawn's powers. Supporting characters may seem underdeveloped in comparison to her—Nitin's team seems to serve simply as a source of levity, and are not particularly relatable or important—but the electricity between the duo at the fore is enough to propel the tale forward.

Stebbins's trilogy remains both fascinating and unpredictable. Those who loved the first book will find themselves enraptured by the second, which secures a ready audience for what will surely be a stunning conclusion.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (June 9, 2014)

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