



After the Golden Age

Carrie Vaughn

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Can an accountant defeat a supervillain? Celia West, only daughter of the heroic leaders of the superpowered Olympiad, has spent the past few years estranged from her parents and their high-powered lifestyle. She's had enough of masks and heroics, and wants only to live her own quiet life out from under the shadow of West Plaza and her rich and famous parents.

Then she is called into her boss' office and told that as the city's top forensic accountant, Celia is the best chance the prosecution has to catch notorious supervillain the Destructor for tax fraud. In the course of the trial, Celia's troubled past comes to light and family secrets are revealed as the rift between Celia and her parents grows deeper. Cut off from friends and family, Celia must come to terms with the fact that she might just be Commerce City's only hope.

This all-new and moving story of love, family, and sacrifice is an homage to Golden Age comics that no fan will want to miss.

After the Golden Age Details

Date : Published April 12th 2011 by Tor Books

ISBN : 9780765325556

Author : Carrie Vaughn

Format : Hardcover 304 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Comics, Superheroes, Science Fiction, Fiction, Urban Fantasy

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From Reader Review After the Golden Age for online ebook

Melissa McShane says

When I reviewed (elsewhere) *Kitty and the Dead Man's Hand* last year, I said I felt Carrie Vaughn was writing down to her audience just a little--that she had more literary ability in her than was on display in that book, or series. (Don't misunderstand; I like the Kitty Norville series a lot and I think it's one of the best in the urban fantasy subgenre. There are just moments where Vaughn makes comments, either as narrator or in dialogue, that are a lot more intellectually elevated than everything around them.) I think *After the Golden Age* proves that theory. In description, dialogue, and even plot, it's more mature than Vaughn's earlier works, and I'm glad to see her doing something beyond just the one series.

The main character, Celia West, is the child of two powerful superheroes, and ones whose civilian identity is known to everyone. Celia, a completely non-super-powered person, pays the price for this by being easy prey for anyone who wants to challenge her parents. So she's been kidnapped who knows how many times since she was in her late teens, which makes it nearly impossible for her to establish her own identity. The return of the Destructor, her personal nemesis as well as the most terrible villain her parents ever defeated, forces her to actually confront her parents, her past, her identity, and her choices for the future.

There's a strong similarity to the movies *Sky High* and *The Incredibles* here--Celia's relationship with her parents echoes the first movie, and the difficulty of juggling private and public identities reflects the second. If *After the Golden Age* seemed slightly inferior to these, I think it's just because superheroic stories benefit so much from a visual component. I loved the superheroes Vaughn invented--she definitely gave them and their powers a lot of thought, pros and cons both. I also liked that there were all these superheroes running around the city and they didn't all know each other's secret identities. Celia's having grown up around masked avengers makes her able to spot the hero Typhoon when she's out of costume, and they end up becoming good friends, which leads to some awkward moments when she encounters Celia's parents--she knows who they are, they don't know who she is, she wants to maintain her identity, etc. And despite being a little put off by his name, I liked Arthur Mentis a lot. (Seriously. He's a telepath and his name happens to be Mentis? His family name, not his superhero handle?) He's sweet and patient and very much in control of his ability, despite its being a handicap to developing close relationships with anyone.

One of the more off-putting story elements was Celia's relationship with her mercurial and super-strong father. It's realistic that they butt heads all the time because they're so much alike, but it always felt as if there was some deeper reason for her father's attitude towards her. There was at least one moment where her father came close to losing his temper, and Celia cringed; to me, that read like the behavior of an abuse victim, and implied some event in the past that put all of that into perspective. But there wasn't. Toward the end, there's a short flashback where we see her father reading all sorts of meanings into everything his baby does: will she have super strength, flight, heat vision...and of course we know that she never gets any of those things, so it's implied that his disappointment about that spilled over into disappointment with her--but that makes him an extremely unsympathetic character. I also wasn't satisfied with the ending, which wrapped up all the loose ends in the span of one chapter. It felt rushed, and it felt like Vaughn was deliberately cutting off any possibility of writing a sequel. But to me, the book already felt like a complete story, not one that needed a second or even third volume, so that final chapter seemed heavy-handed.

There's a scene near the middle of the action--the turning point of Celia's story, really--in which she meets the now-retired Hawk, a superhero in the Batman mode who was the first of the "vigilante" costumed heroes. Celia tells him that she can't go out and stop the Destructor's plan because she's not like her parents, she

doesn't have superpowers. He tells her, "Neither did I." *After the Golden Age* isn't just about the super-powered heroes; Celia West stands for all those ordinary people who put on the costume anyway.

Nikki says

It's been a while since I read this the first time, so I felt I should revisit it before I read the second book, even though I gather that follows the next generation. I was right that I needed to do that: a lot goes on that I'd forgotten the details of. I think this was the first superhero novel I read, possibly before I got into comics; it's made me eager to read as many other superhero novels as I could, though so far I've just got to the point of collecting them all up, not actually reading them yet...

Anyway, this is a fun story; actually, it's not exactly a superhero story in the traditional sense, because while the main character is the daughter of superheroes, she doesn't have any powers of her own, unless you count being a kickass accountant. I guess on a second read you can see that it's a little bit predictable, that the characters are not all developed... it's a little bit tropey: I can see that same parental relationship problem as there is in Perry Moore's *Hero*, for example. It's a fairly predictable problem to have if your parents are really famous, let alone if they have superpowers. Worse if you don't have superpowers.

I did like, though, that there was a certain ambivalence about Warren. He's a hero, sure, and he's learned to control things. And his daughter is important to him. But then he's also thinking mad things like dropping his daughter off a roof to see if her power is flight, and nearly attacking her because she doesn't go his way... And then again, on the flip side of that, he's doing his best to rein himself in and reconcile. And they don't quite reconcile, it's not quite that easy, but they make some moves in that direction. Celia herself is a little ambivalent: she feels like she could flip and go with the supervillains, she has spent time with her father's main adversary primarily to split from her parents and rile him up.

The relationship with Arthur Mentis could be problematic, but they kind of deal with the fact that he knew her as a child, and the story definitely deals with the way his mindreading affects the relationship.

All in all, it's still really enjoyable, at least to my mind, and I'm looking forward to fiiinally reading the sequel.

Posted on my blog [here](#).

Squeee says

Although I read this book in a single afternoon, I ended up feeling irritated and a bit cheated at the end. An awful lot of the book is a prolonged whine by the main character, Celia West, who has a major issue with being the normal daughter of two super-powered parents.

The book starts out all right and even has some decent humorous moments, but as it progresses it becomes more and more clear that Celia is a narcissistic idiot who really hasn't learned anything from her life experiences. Her "teenage rebellion" is (view spoiler), and she feels only indignation at the mention of it rather than shame or regret. Yikes. There is a shallow love story pasted on to the barely-there main plot, but neither of Celia's suitors is adequately fleshed out or has any chemistry with Celia. Her father actually seems

to be a bigger jerk than she is in some ways, but have no fear--he will be redeemed in the tidiest, most cliched possible way.

I picked up this book without realizing that it was from the same author as the Kitty Norville books, of which I've only read the first (and will not read any more). I seem to be encountering lately a glut of books featuring privileged, fairly well-off, yet incredibly whiny and shallow young women whose lives just aren't quite perfect enough (and who can't shut the eff up about it), and Carrie Vaughn seems to be a serial offender. I'm done with this author.

EDIT: Oh good God, I see that this book has now been designated the first in a series and another one is coming in January. I don't know what to say. I'm not sure who is worse--the publishing industry that keeps pimping junk like this, *Twilight*, *Eragon*, *City of Bones*, etc., or the shallow, subliterate masses that buy them in such numbers as to justify it. Bah.

Nan says

This novel was utterly amazing and fantastic. Vaughn clearly knows superhero literature, and her fondness for the genre allows her to write in it with respect while analyzing the tensions at the heart of superhero mythology.

Celia West is the famous daughter of Commerce City's two most famous superheros--Captain Olympus and Spark, the founding members of the Olympiad. They were not the city's first superheros--a masked man called Hawk fought crime before they did. Hawk had no powers, and he retired just as the Captain and Spark became proficient at their calling. Celia has very little contact with her parents. She cut all ties with them when she was a teenager. They always placed the welfare of the city before their daughter, and while she could understand their priorities, she also found it difficult to bear. Villains always assumed that Celia was a priority in her parents' lives, and she was kidnapped several times (six and counting . . .) in an attempt to control her parents. It never worked.

Part of the distance between Celia and her parents stems from the fact that she's normal. She has no powers and no common ground to share with them. This distance--as well as her relative fragility--makes it difficult for them to relate to one another.

This is the situation as *After the Golden Age* opens. Celia is working as a forensic accountant in a firm that consults for the DA. After her most recent kidnapping attempt, the DA asks specifically for her to be assigned to what may be the case of the century--a tax fraud prosecution of the Destructor, a notorious villain and her parents' arch nemesis. As Celia digs into the case, her complicated history resurfaces in such a way to cast doubt on her reliability. Celia cannot bear the thought of being judged for her prior acts, and she digs deeper into the Destructor case to prove her worth. She's also concerned because several new gangs are attempting to take control of Commerce City. It's clear that there's a mastermind behind the recent attacks, but it's not clear just who that might be. The Destructor is locked away, and someone new seems to have stepped up to fill the vacuum.

Alternately funny and shocking and heart-rending, *After the Golden Age* questions one city's reliance on its heroes as saviors. Moving between Celia's past and present, the novel explores the complicated relationship between our childhood and our adulthood as the parents we both love and despise shape us to become like them.

Vaughn is not a stylist. Her prose is clean and serviceable, establishing the points she's making with a minimum of description or purple prose. All the same, her quiet observations of characters make this novel the powerful story that it is. When I first heard about this book, I knew that I wanted to read it. Once it was available, I bought it almost immediately and read it almost all the way through in one day. This is a fast-paced story, one that gets you to care about characters and the City where they live.

I believe I said this about Carrie Vaughn's other standalone novel, *Discord's Apple*, and I'll repeat myself here. I do not want Vaughn to write a sequel to this book. *After the Golden Age* is a fantastic story from beginning to end, and I don't want to see that perfection weakened in a series.

Marlene says

Originally published at Reading Reality

Why did I wait so long to read this?

That's not a coherent review, but it was my first thought. I poured through this in an afternoon, barely stopping for breath or meals. *After the Golden Age* is awesome stuff.

It's a superhero story. But really, it's a post-superhero story. It's the origin and the aftermath all rolled into one glorious exploding KA-POW!

It also reminded me a little bit of *The Incredibles*. What do the superheroes do when they aren't out there fighting crime? How would they raise a non-superpowered child?

How would you feel if you were the mundane child of the Fantastic Four? If everyone around you had a secret identity, and you were just "original recipe human"?

It's pretty easy to walk in Celia West's shoes, and feel that every day would be a major blow to her self-confidence. If most people either emulate their parents or choose lives in reaction against them, well, without superpowers Celia's choices were limited. Emulation was out.

She chose reaction. Instead of a spandex uniform, she became a forensic accountant, a job most people consider the most boring option on the planet. Of course, that was after a teenage rebellion where she tried the path of evil. For two whole months.

After having been kidnapped. Again. Celia gets kidnapped a lot. It happens so often she's a bit bored by the whole thing.

As an adult, Celia has tried to create a life that doesn't reflect the glow of her parents' super-shininess, no matter many assumptions people make about how wonderful it must have been to grow up in the Olympiads' inner circle, or how often people try to use her to get close to her famous parents.

But then her boss asks her to bring her accounting skills to bear on the latest "trial of the century". (There's always a trial of the century, haven't you noticed?) The world's greatest supervillain, The Destructor, has finally been called to account for his misdeeds, not for his heinous destruction, but for his financial chicanery. (This is classic, Al Capone was finally convicted for tax evasion)

But The Destructor is a combination of Kryptonite and Achilles' Heel for both Celia and The Olympiad. As Celia unravels the winding trail of his black ops' funding, she finds an origin story she never expected to uncover. And with it, the birth of a conspiracy theory that will bring down the foundation of everything that the good people of Commerce City have ever believed in.

But she will also discover the truth about herself.

Escape Rating A+: After the Golden Age is about the creation and destruction of legends. We find it so easy to put people up on pedestals, and even easier to pull them down. While it's amazing how quickly the population is manipulated to turn on their heroes, it's also easy to understand. We've seen it happen in real life.

Celia West is the main point of view character, a normal person in a family of supers. She is still recovering, almost atoning, from one act of teenage rebellion. She has had to define her own self-worth from a perspective where nearly everyone, including her own parents, has always judged her as "less-than" because she isn't super.

So many people have tried to use her to get close to her family; she's accustomed to it. But when her boss does it, her research deconstructs the legend. Her process of discovery is meticulous without ever being dull, and it occurs on two layers. For each scrap of history she uncovers, she also finds a bit more of her own truth.

After the Golden Age reads like myth creation. And like the best myths, it feels true.

TheBookSmugglers says

Original review published on The Book Smugglers: [HERE](#)

First Impressions:

Ana: What do I expect when picking up a book about superheroes to read? I expect to be at the very least entertained; I expect it to be fun. Anything beyond that is added bonus. After the Golden Age met my expectations right on the head: I devoured this book. More than that, it provided me food for thought on the nature of heroism which in this case, counts as the aforementioned added bonus. Although it is not a perfect book, I did have a great time reading it.

Thea: I'm familiar with Carrie Vaughn's work, having read her Kitty Norville series and one of her YA offerings (Steel). Although I've had varied experiences with these books, I've been entertained by all of them, and so was very excited to see Ms. Vaughn tackle the superhero world with After the Golden Age. And you know what? I liked it. I really, truly liked it and found myself drawn into the story and unwilling to put the book down until I had finished the entire thing. Although there are a few niggles and character issues that bothered me along the way, After the Golden Age is a wonderful homage to the superheroes of old, and a damn fun book at the same time.

On the Plot:

Ana: Celia West is the only daughter of the world's greatest superheroes, the two leaders of the Olympiad

(the superteam that protects the citizens of Commerce City). Having no superpowers of her own, Celia is an accountant who tries to lead her life as far away from her parents' lifestyle as much as she can, but unfortunately the shadow of her estranged super-parents follows her everywhere she goes. When she is called by the DA's office to help prosecute the super villain The Destructor for tax fraud, Celia is pushed back into the life she wished she could leave behind and simply forget. But then she stumbles upon a secret that could change everything.

The plot of *After the Golden Age* is two-fold: Part mystery, part coming-of-age. The first relates a series of crimes affecting Commerce City with new villains coming into the game just as The Destructor seems to be taking a back seat – or is he? This new series of crimes is what leads Celia to start investigating the past and possible connections between The Destructor and The Olympiad and the mystery surrounding the very beginning of super-powered beings. Although the answer to the mystery was heavily telegraphed and easy to guess, the point was to actually inspire the discussion about whether superheroes are born or made. This to me, is quite possibly the best aspect of the novel (or any other novels about superheroes, really). Although, I don't think this was explored with the depth it deserved, it still made for an interesting side aspect of the novel making it more of a *Watchmen* -like read than say, a *JLA* one.

The other main theme is Celia's role in all this and her coming of age. Although it sounds weird to say that since she is of course, a woman and not a young girl it seemed that up to the point where the novel started, she had been living in a limbo of self-denial, but more on that later on.

Thea: From a pure writing and storytelling standpoint, Carrie Vaughn is at the top of her game with *After the Golden Age*. The pace of the story clips along quickly and adeptly, as Celia gradually puts the pieces together and figures out not only the mystery of the recent crime spree in her city, but also uncovers some old family history. While I completely agree with Ana that the mystery was pretty transparent, and some of Celia's actions whilst uncovering the truth are headdeskingly frustrating, the storytelling is so even-handed that none of that obviousness truly seemed to matter. In many ways, *After the Golden Age* reads just like a traditional Urban Fantasy novel – there's the same isolated heroine, the same peril facing some urban location that only the heroine can stop (even though she doesn't want to get involved).

Now, while the storytelling is great, I enjoyed myself, and sped through the book like *Breezeway* (one of the superheroes in the Olympiad), there were a few mechanical and thematic things that bothered me. First, when Celia does all her "research" and discovers the truth of West Corporation's medical experiments (at about halfway through the book) and also draws a conclusion about an unlikely villain, instead of telling anyone about her earth-shattering discoveries, she decides to keep it quiet because...she doesn't have enough evidence? Or something? I really, really dislike these plot devices, wherein characters know things but choose not to tell them in order to build tension and ultimately result in calamity later, after which the character will look back in tear-streaked regret screaming, *If ONLY I told them!*, whilst shaking their fists dramatically at the sky. Ahem.

This next part is a minor spoiler – so if you don't want to know, look away! The other problem I had with the story was in the revelation of a key emotion that can be engineered/inspired that will: stop criminals, end murder, and foster superheroes. Besides the fact that this supermachine was haphazardly thrown into the story in the last 20 pages or so (and felt very much like a Mighty Morphin Power Ranger villain device, super campy and cartoony in nature), I didn't really like the emotion that is singled out as the cause for superheroics. It changes the whole slant of the story and the psychology of the characters, implying that they do what they do not just because they know it is right and good, but because somehow that has been engineered in their DNA. That does not sit well with me at all.

On the Characters:

Ana: Celia was an insufferable character walking around with a chip on her shoulder and for the majority of the book she complains and whines about her terrible childhood, how she wants to be independent and recognised as an individual rather than a member of the West family. The thing is, I don't think she was supposed to be a likeable character at all but she was in my opinion a sympathetic and relatable one, despite all that.

Because you see, I understand her problems.¹ Can you imagine growing up in a family of super-powered people, with everybody expecting YOU to become a super-hero as well, all of your movements observed since early childhood to see if you develop super strength or the ability to fly and then when none of that happens, you are met with frustration and disappointment? Not only from your parents but yours as well because of course, you want to be a super-hero too? That's Celia's childhood – not to mention that her father is not exactly a good parent at all, being aggressive and distant. So, there are some real issues there not to mention the worst case of Teen rebellion ever, when Celia joined forces with a super-villain just to irritate her parents. Although I don't think this was explored with the seriousness it deserved beyond Celia saying she regretted it half-assedly.

All considered, I truly enjoyed her journey though – to find a place in this world, a place that would be possible for her to help out and that the embodiment of what heroism truly means.

Another character I loved was (and Thea will say: of course you did, dear Ana) Dr. Mentis. I won't spoil much about how fits in the overall story but I have this enormous sympathy for Telepaths. This has got to be the worst, most problematic superpower that exists because of the ethical repercussions of using their powers. I would have liked to see more discussion about this ethical issue although I think I understand what made Celia SO comfortable with having her mind read all the time – it just made it easier for her to be understood. I guess. Maybe.

Thea: I began this book and immediately, Celia got on my nerves. Yes, she's had to grow up with the pressure of her parents' success pushing down on her, the fact that she has no superpowers, blah blah blah. At the same time, she's a freaking multibillionaire, has inherited her mom's smoking hotness, and despite not having any superpowers, she's got a good head on her shoulders. Poor little rich girl, indeed.

That said, I think Ana makes a great point – Celia's not really supposed to be likable (at least...I don't think she is). She's like...the little sister/cousin/friend that still thinks and acts like a teenager, despite being in their twenties. She's the kind of character that whines about not being taken seriously, when she even still refers to herself as a child and her parents and the Olympiad as "grown-ups." She's the kind of character that refuses anyone watching her, despite the fact that she gets kidnapped on a regular basis, just because she wants her "freedom."²

In short, she's a huge freaking pain in the ass.

BUT. She grows over the course of the book, finally gets her head out of her ass (sort of) and makes atonement for the mistakes of her past. And that's kind of cool. Celia is a frustrating character, but for however annoying, she was certainly fleshed out and believable. I only wish that her parents were a little more detailed in the book – we never learn much about her father beyond his temper and superpowers, or about her mother beyond her weepiness and ability to cook a good marinara. Celia's relationship with her family is so complex and layered, and I wish it could have been explored more fully.

And as for the rest of the cast...no one is really detailed in any of the same length as Celia, with the exception of Arthur Mantis. And yes, Ana, OF COURSE you loved him. I felt like the romance angle in this book was a bit rushed and lacked finesse, but I did like the match itself.

Final Thoughts, Observations & Rating:

Ana: As I said, I devoured this book like I usually devour a bag of crisps. It was fun, it had some awesome moments there (I loved the ending) and despite its flaws, it was just a cool super-hero book.

Thea: After the Golden Age is a solid, quick read that does its job: it entertains. It's a fun book, like Ana says, and a good candidate for a quick road trip or poolside read.

Nikki says

I'm on a bit of a superheroes kick since The Avengers came out and reminded me of a childhood spent breathlessly waiting for the next episode of Batman, or Spiderman, or Superman. These days I'm more of a Marvel fan -- is it, uh, legal to admit that I watched the first ten minutes of Batman Begins and got bored? -- but anyway, the point is, superheroes! And Carrie Vaughan's After the Golden Age catered to that wonderfully.

I think the premise at its most basic isn't really anything new: the child of two superheroes, who is powerless, rebels and gradually finds her own place in the world. I liked that she was an accountant. I liked that she got tired and frustrated and did things wrong, and that she second guessed her own motives.

Best I liked the romance. It didn't turn out how I was expecting, and it was a pleasant surprise. It was well built up and brought together.

Overall, the prose wasn't stunning but the pacing was good, and the moments of shock and pain reach through to the reader perfectly. It's a quick read, and also the kind of read where you aren't conscious of the time that does pass -- in my experience, anyway.

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

To call Carrie Vaughn's profoundly disappointing *After the Golden Age* a tired retread of ideas that have been almost entirely played out by now is to make an understatement; because really, is there anyone even left besides lazy entertainment reporters who isn't aware by now of the darkly comedic subgenre regarding superheroes with mundane psychological problems? It was groundbreaking when Frank Miller and Alan Moore did it unironically in the '80s, hilarious when *The Specials* and *Mystery Men* played it for laughs in the '90s, and still at least interesting when Pixar mainstreamed the concept in *The Incredibles*; but in these days when there are even now weekly television shows based around the idea, it takes a lot more to make this concept interesting anymore besides simply parking a caped crusader in a Muzak-blaring psychiatrist's office and hoping that hijinx will ensue. Unfortunately, though, this actually isn't the worst problem with the

book; that would be the fact that the nuances of the three-act structure seem to be completely beyond Vaughn's comprehension, with some of the most awkward exposition I've ever seen in a mainstream contemporary novel, and a bad habit of taking minor moments of conflict and trying to inflate them into drama that's bigger than they can handle, much like you might see in a Young Adult novel when a misinterpreted statement between one teen and another will literally be the main conflict driving an entire second act. (And indeed, I think it no coincidence that what Vaughn is mostly known for is the unending "Kitty Norville" series of teen-girl werewolf love-story actioners, a commercial juggernaut that I'm sure is the reason she got a contract for this novel as well.) Beyond disappointing to make me actively angry that a book this badly written would get so much attention, needless to say that it does not come recommended today.

Out of 10: **4.6**

Rebecca says

This is exactly what I would want in a novel about superheroes. It's not a parody or takedown of the form--it's a genuine exploration of themes in greater detail but with fewer big set pieces than you would get in a comic book series, but with a self-awareness that doesn't play everything perfectly straight. It's using the strengths of a different storytelling medium to their greatest effect. And it's a well-paced, emotionally compelling, plain-old-good-read.

Celia is a forensic accountant, and a good one. It doesn't much matter to her father, Captain Olympus, who has never valued anything she's done since she failed to develop superpowers. The fact that it's her work that puts his greatest enemy behind bars, something the superhero was never able to do, merely makes him angry. But over the course of the trial, secrets about Celia's past come to light, ruining the life she's managed to construct for herself.

There's some fabulously-written angst here, as Celia loses everything because of mistakes she made a long time ago. It's not overdone, and it doesn't wallow, but certain places brought a genuine lump to my throat. There's also a surprisingly sweet love story.

I did manage to mostly figure out one mystery early on, but was sufficiently distracted by other plot elements not to feel let down when my guess turned out to be correct. It was merely satisfying--yes, that makes sense.

There are only two bits that didn't really work for me. Given how fast everyone turns on Celia, I thought the speed at which many of them change their minds was unrealistic. And a critical piece of information is never really addressed, probably to protect a plot point. Commerce City must be the only city in the world with super heroes. The casualness of the relationship between the heroes and the city, as well as each other, deliberately parallels a DC- or Marvel-style universe, in which every city has at least a handful of superheroes and villains, and new ones crop up all the time. However, the ending only makes sense if this is not the case.

These are fridge logic flaws--things that will not bother you until you get up afterward to go get a snack. Within the world of the book, however, the compelling characters make for an engrossing, and bittersweet, read.

Becky says

So it seems that this book was destined to help me make up for lost time! I absolutely could not put this book down once I started it. And I have to say that I was completely surprised by this book. It was so much better than I ever thought it would be.

It starts out feeling a little comicbookish, a little cartoony. I mean, it's about super heroes, for goodness sake. And that aspect of the story is very comicbookish - not that that is a bad thing. If that was all there was to the story, I'd have still liked it, but it would have been a 3-star like, rather than a 5-star love. But there was so much more to this story than a good vs bad, superhero vs villain story. This was a really interesting and innovative twist on the story that sucked me right in and kept me glued to the pages until there weren't any more of them. And now I feel a bit sad that it's over.

I was very surprised at how emotional this book was. I completely identified with the main character's feelings of isolation and desperation and despair and frustration and everything in the situation that she was in. In fact, I thought she handled the situation infinitely better than I would have. I would have probably shut down and closed up shop and said 'screw it, then'. I have to give Celia credit for not doing that, and not giving up.

I really loved this book, and as an introduction to Carrie Vaughn's writing, it was amazing. Now my only concern is that her other books might not live up to this one.

Wealhtheow says

The daughter of the world's greatest superheroes has no superpowers, and just wants to be left alone to have a nice, normal life as an accountant. But then she's kidnapped yet again, and *then* her parents' arch-nemesis is put on trial for tax evasion--and she's called as a star witness.

Modern stories about superheroes usually go one of two routes: as grim and depressing as they can get (ex: Watchmen, anything by Frank Miller...) or wry and ironic, like the genre is a joke and they're above it. Rarely, a book manages to do neither, but still manages to feel realistic and current. This is one of those books. The characters have believably complicated emotional lives and motivations, even while there are dastardly plans and superpowers all around. The end is a little weak, but overall I really enjoyed this.

Jessica Strider says

Pros: interesting take on the superhero lifestyle, protagonist has a fascinating back story and bitter streak, quick read

Cons: climax was a let down, predictable

Celia West is the daughter of two of Commerce City's quartet of superpowered defenders, Captain Olympus and Spark. Having grown up a disappointment to them, her only power is being kidnapped by every two-bit criminal who wants to avoid her parents' interference in their affairs. Starting with Simon Sito, the Destructor, the man who exposed her parents' secret identities.

Sito is now on trial for crimes against the city and Celia's on the prosecution's team, digging up accounting records that can help put him away for good. But the trial brings up a youthful indiscretion that proves you can't escape your past and no amount of clean living can erase a stupid decision - if your parents are famous enough.

This is a fun novel if you're a fan of comic books. The West Plaza and 4 member team reminding me a lot of the Fantastic Four (but only in a general way).

Celia's a sympathetic protagonist. While everyone she meets is in awe of her parents and can't understand why she's at odds with them, through the plot and flashbacks it's easy to see where she's coming from. She's bitter about a lot of things and comes off snarky at times, while trying to stay out from under her parents' shadows. And she makes for a mostly intelligent hostage.

My only complaint is that there weren't many twists to the story. The main bad guy's pretty easy to figure out (to the point that I started second guessing myself thinking it couldn't be that easy). The climax was a bit of a let down, though the denouement made up for it.

It's a fun romp and a quick read.

Tamora Pierce says

It's one thing to believe your parents are perfect, and another to know they are. Celia's parents are super heroes, and she has spent ten years trying to escape their shadow. Unfortunately, her biggest teenaged rebellion resulted in their unmasking, which turned her into every criminal's favorite hostage. Now she's working as an accountant on the case that will put away her family's biggest foe--but will her own mistake be exposed?

It's a multi-layered book. I couldn't help but read Celia's superhero dad as a rageoholic, whose emotional bullying nearly loses him his only child, while her mother is an enabler, and Celia is the teenager who must escape an abusive him. Her friends are few and precious, and despite someone's deliberate plan to use her to destroy the city, she is determined to stop the coming war between superheroes and a mastermind bent on slaughter!

This is my second reading, and I liked it even more than last time, obviously.

Colleen says

A fun breezy read--very reminiscent of The Incredibles, so if you liked that movie, you'll probably enjoy this book. Although not a short book (like 350 pages), it reads very fast and the hero, Celia West, daughter of 2 super-heroes, is good at two things. Her job as an accountant, and getting kidnapped, which happens with regularity. I'll have to check out the next one.

Cloak88 says

An unusual story set in a superhero world. 3.5 stars

Celia West is the daughter of the world's greatest superheroes Captain Olympus and Spark. And that's not an easy position to be in. Not having powers of her own, she is essentially defenceless each and every time her parents enemies take her hostage. To escape from all this she has built her own life separate from theirs and all the madness. Now however the trial of the century is about to start. The Destructor, her parents greatest enemy, is on trial for tax fraud and she is the DA's forensic accountant on the case...

This was an interesting if somewhat rough novel. Celia grew up in a very tense household. Never knowing whether her parents would be alright, not having powers of her own and being a big disappointment to her father because of it, has left its marks on her. Though she has worked hard to make something of herself, she will always be in the shadow of her illustrious parents. In that light Celia makes for an interesting, if not always a happy character and that shows in the feel of the novel. On the whole this is more of a mystery story set in a superhero world than a superhero story.

Good, but a bit unusual of a superhero story.

J'aime says

Mom's Review: If you're into superhero comics, this book may be for you. If you can enjoy a comic book without the artwork that makes the story come alive, that is. You may be wondering why I ordered this book? Two reasons: I love the author's Kitty Norville series, and I thought this was the sequel to her novel "Discord's Apple," which I did enjoy. It isn't - it's a stand alone YA novel.

The plot is predictable to most readers who are familiar with DC and Marvel comics and their wonderful, fully developed superheroes. I want a little more substance in my stories aside from "good guys fight bad guys, and also fight cops who misunderstand their motives and call them vigilantes". But what really ruined it for me was that it is yet another book about an adult child who resents his/her parents and goes out of his/her way to get even with them for not giving him/her a perfect childhood! Throwing in this disgruntled "heroine" didn't help an already cliche story. And, I really need to identify with or at least like the protagonist I'm about to spend an entire book with. I'm not saying I wouldn't enjoy a novel with superhero characters. I have enjoyed graphic novels like those by Alan Moore, and I love superhero movies. I just felt this book, while perhaps a good idea to begin with, wasn't well executed. It felt like a bad ripoff of "The Incredibles" with one powerless, bratty child. Obviously, others have enjoyed this and it will find an audience. And, I highly recommend the author's other series. Overall, I found this to be a disappointment.

Jacob Proffitt says

What a ride! I had such a hard time putting this down once I started it. And not just for the action, though there was certainly a lot of it. Celia was such a great character with depth beyond the initial gimmick. What *would* it be like growing up normal as the child of the two most powerful superheroes the city has ever seen? Or to be victim to yet *another* kidnapping—an occurrence so frequent as to be almost passé? But those are only the obvious questions. Celia is so much deeper than that—so much more real.

Celia has fought against being a mere appendage to her parents all her life, pulling away from them in every way she can think of only to be pulled back in time after time. After all, however much *she* may distance herself, the villains still know who her parents are.

So the book is as much about family and love and hate and rebellion and reconciliation as anything else—all without letting up on the action.

The only part I had a problem with was Celia's love life. I wasn't very convinced by any of her non-family relationships. Fortunately, they weren't a big part of the novel and if I just accept them as presented, they're okay. Kind of disappointing for a die-hard romantic like myself, however.

Shae McDaniel says

Eh. Like a poor man's *Rook* mixed with *Steelheart*. It was okay. I'd rather reread *Rook*. 2.5 stars.

Laura says

I waffled between three and four stars, but finally I gave it four because I had a rough time putting it down. In fact, I actually stayed up later than I intended to just to finish the book, something I haven't wanted to do in a long time. Celia West is a woman that felt as though she wasn't enough her entire childhood, mostly because her parents are superheros and she doesn't have any powers. Also, her dad has bordering-on-abusive tendencies because he apparently has a temper. While trying to make a "normal" life for herself, Celia is constantly being kidnapped and held hostage. This gets a little annoying in the book. I started to laugh every time she was abducted, and I don't think the author intended for that to be my reaction.

Celia's life becomes even more difficult when one of her rebellious teenage moments comes back to haunt her. Honestly, I know she kept insisting it was a stupid thing she did when she was younger, but I thought it was excessive. Sure, every teenager tests their parents, but her actions were pretty desperate. I guess that's because she has daddy issues.

The romance part of the book was probably my favorite. I don't want to spoil it, so I'll just say that it was sweet and I was pleasantly surprised that it happened.

Mike (the Paladin) says

It seems like so many of these "superhero novels" are written by people who, don't have fond memories of the original superheros. I'm not sure Carrie Vaughn feels that way... she seems to me to fall into the "nobody could REALLY be that much of a hero" slot as her book sets out to prove.

Celia West is the grown "normal" (read non-super powered) daughter of the "Worlds Greatest Super Hero Couple" (Sky High did it better). We get treated to her misery at having had to grow up with her angry dad and "super-competent" as well as "super" mother. AND we get the story of her rebellious teen age years , "all not her fault and completely understandable of course because her life with her parents was just sooooooo unbearable..."

Pardon me as I gag.

Of course as we discover...nothing is what it seemed or what anyone thought it was.

Yes, yes, we've been there, done that (got the T-shirt). Enjoy it if it's your cup of tea. I didn't hate it...much, but I didn't like it either. Not for me. I almost went with 2 stars but then I thought, why kid myself. There are books I've rated 2 stars I liked far better...so, maybe 1.3, or maybe .5???? Oh well.
